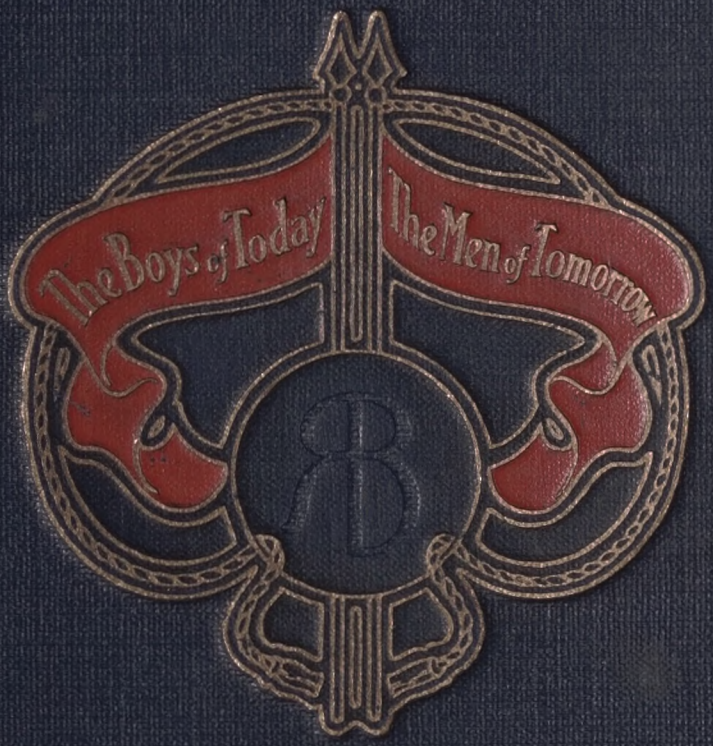
Jerry King
Timber Cruiser



Carl Brandt

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Jerry King, Timber Cruiser

Instinct told Pierre that it would be useless to call a warning to Jerry. As if shot from a gun he leaped for the boy.

Jerry King
Timber Cruiser

By

Carl Brandt

Illustrated by Harry A. Armstrong

The Reilly & Britton Co
Chicago

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Jerry King, Timber Cruiser

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Jerry King, Timber Cruiser

CHAPTER I

NORTHWARD BOUND

In the late afternoon the train was still running through the parched expanse of desert which it had entered some time during the previous night. The passengers had been stifled since early morning by the heat and choked by the minute particles of grit and dirt that came sifting in through every crevice and crack. While this kept up, the passengers remained silent, trying in the forgetfulness of sleep to doze away their great discomfort. No one tried to talk, and there was no pleasure in reading.

Therefore, it was like a tonic when suddenly the empty miles of sand gave way to scattered trees whose trunks slipped silently by the windows, and a degree of coolness tempered the oven-like air in the day coach. People began to

wake up and stretch themselves and take an interest in what was going on around them.

The change in atmosphere affected a pair who were occupying a seat near the center of the car. First, a tall man of perhaps thirty-five disentangled himself from the cramped position in which he had been sitting and straightened up, stretching to limber up his muscles.

A moment later his companion did likewise. He was a boy of perhaps sixteen, tall for his age, yet in no way giving the idea of having grown too fast. He was slender, but it was clear that he was in good condition and that every muscle was properly trained.

"Tired, Jerry?" the man wanted to know, as they sat down again.

"You bet! So tired that I hope I'll never see a train again. But it's a lot better than riding on the brake-beams ——"

"You've hoboed it, then?" said the man, surprised.

"Some little. That was before I hooked up with the Reclamation Service. But, Link, tell me something about yourself. From what you said, you seem to have been everywhere and

done everything, but I've never had the whole yarn."

Link O'Day smiled. "I reckon I've had my share of excitement, but it's nothing to boast about. I've been bucking the world a long time now and have had lots of chances to see and do things." Then he sobered. "Done so much I'm getting a little tired. That's why I happened to be down at old Thad Holman's ranch when you were there. It's more like home there than any other place I know."

"I remember he said one day that you came and went pretty often."

"Yes, Thad was mighty good to me once when——" O'Day stopped short. It was as if he had been on the edge of saying something he did not wish to reveal. "But never mind about that now. I happened to be there and you blew in and here we are dusting it for the north and the piny woods!"

"I don't know whether we are dusting it or it is dusting us," laughed Jerry King, shaking a cloud of white particles from his coat. "But, anyway, I'm sure glad I'm with you, although I'd have liked to see the big dam finished." The

boy said the last few words a little wistfully. For a few moments both were silent with memories of recent events.

When Jerry King first met his present companion he had been a rodman on the Government Reclamation project which when finished would wipe out with the stored water the ranch of Holman, O'Day's friend. The boy had discovered that some renegade cattlemen were in league with the Mexican laborers at the dam to destroy and delay the work as much as possible. This plot was to culminate in an attack on the workmen's village by a band of Mexican outlaws. The intention back of all this, beyond sheer hostility to the dam, was to force the United States to invade Mexico, conquer it and thereby open a great new territory under the Stars and Stripes.

In order best to protect the dam, Jerry had seemed to fall in with the plotters and Mexicans and had acted as their go-between. At the last moment his plan had been to fetch a detachment of cavalry from the nearest fort and catch all the plotters red-handed. This would have worked beautifully had not a fellow rodman, named Bob Hazard, become suspicious. This

boy mixed himself in the game and his activities forced the plotters to act before the appointed time. But while Bob Hazard's interference had prevented Jerry's plans from taking effect, the dam had been saved and the bandits routed with glory enough for both Bob and himself.

It had been exciting and good fun while it lasted, but Jerry had realized that engineering was not the life work for which he was particularly suited. When Link O'Day, who had helped him in his plotting against the plotters, began to talk of forestry and lumbering, Jerry felt a strong desire to pull up stakes and try his hand at the new game. It might prove to be the one thing he was fitted for. But as he had just remarked, he left the Service with a real regret that he was not to help finish the dam.

"But you were going to tell me some of your adventures," Jerry reminded, coming back from the past.

"No, not now," said his companion. "I don't quite know where to begin. You tell me something about yourself. All I know is your name——"

Jerry King hesitated a moment before reply-

ing, for it meant revealing that which was most intimate and sacred to the homeless boy — the little he knew about his origin. He had warmed up to this man as he had to no one else in his life. O'Day had been willing to take him on trust, had been good to him, and had asked no questions until now. Wasn't it perhaps due him to be told as much as he himself knew?

"All right, Link," he said at last, "I'll weary you with my short sad tale."

But the man had noticed the evident hesitation on the boy's part.

"No, not unless you want to, son," he put in hurriedly. "Out this way a fellow's business is his own. I just had a hunch that you might like to tell me. Seems to me you've been carrying around quite a bunch of trouble that recent happenings couldn't have caused. Right?"

"You're right enough," answered the boy, "but it's a trouble that won't ever go away, I reckon. It helped some though when I told Bob Hazard about it."

"You told him, did you?"

"Down in the Labyrinth Canyon, which we went through together."

"You never told me about that stunt. They used to say no one could ever get through the Labyrinth alive."

"*We* did though! And found a bully location for a dam besides. It was just after we'd had an upset and Bob pulled me out of the river —— saved me from drowning —— that I told him. He was the first I ever told."

Link O'Day kept silent. Presently Jerry went on.

"I never said anything about it before, because it sounded sort of babyish, and I've been herded with a hard bunch ever since I can remember. I didn't want to be laughed at."

"I know," said Link softly.

"Well, it's just that I don't *belong* to anybody. I haven't any family that I know of and no matter what I do there isn't anybody to care. Something just came over me in the canyon and I spilled it all to Bob just as I'm spilling it to you. He cared enough to save my life and —— and you —— you've been a friend."

"Thank you," was the grave comment. But Jerry went on as if he had not been interrupted:

"The first thing I remember is being kicked

out on the streets in Chicago to sell papers and getting a licking when I didn't bring home enough pennies."

"Who did the licking?" asked the man, resentment in his tone.

"Either Tim Fallon or his wife; the first one to reach me did the job. Before I found out they weren't my parents, I didn't mind so much, as all the other kids in the neighborhood got the same dose. But they got some sort of — of — of love too ——" The boy hesitated over the word, but once it was out, went on: "But they let me know soon enough that I'd been wished on 'em — said I'd been found in a basket on the doorstep one morning."

"From what you say of their treatment of you, I don't believe that," flashed Link. "If they weren't paid for it, or expected to be paid sometime, they'd have shipped you to an orphan asylum!"

"Think so?" asked Jerry. "Maybe, but I figured they thought they could make me earn my keep. Anyhow, that point doesn't matter much. I might just as well belong to them for all I'll ever know who really were my folks."

"But how did you get the name of King?" O'Day asked, much puzzled. "Did Fallon tell you it was yours?"

"Oh, no. I picked that up after I went on the road with the Denver Kid. Some farmer's wife where I was sent to beg a meal wanted to know my last name, so I told her the first one I could think of. I had just seen the name 'King' painted on a plow or cultivator that was standing by the road as I came in the gate."

"So you had a dose of hoboing it, did you?" queried the man. "How'd that happen?"

"Tim licked me too hard one night in the springtime and I was ready to take up with anybody that came along. Happened to be the Denver Kid, who was looking for a boy to take on the road with him and do his dirty work. He spun me a yarn about the wild open country and its pleasures. I fell for it. The country was all right, but until I finally ducked the Denver Kid I didn't find that there was much pleasure in begging grub and doing household chores for a tramp. But when I finally beat it I fell into the best luck I've ever had."

"Yes?" encouraged O'Day, as his companion

seemed likely to drift off the straight narrative.

"It was a great time. A Mrs. Olson took me in at harvest time and when it was over let me stay on and go to school in the winter. I got all the schooling I ever had there. She was sure good to me; she used to — scold me just like I'd been her own boy."

"Why did you leave?"

"She died," said the boy shakily. "I — I just drifted along then, going with the harvest. Finally I bumped into Steve Whitney, who signed me up with the Reclamation Service. You know the rest. Nothing much there to make me sorry for myself, is there?" he laughed, a little bitterly, thought O'Day.

"I don't think your trouble is that you're sorry for yourself," said the man slowly. "Seems to me you have just been so lonely all your life you can't help wishing for someone to care a little about you. I think it's the most natural thing in the world."

"Do you, honest?" begged the boy, his eyes shining. "You don't think I've been playing the cry baby?"

"Certainly not! Whenever you get blue you

just let it out on me. I'm — I'm a little lonely myself. But didn't the first call for dinner go through here a little while back?"

"If it didn't, here's the second call now," Jerry said, as the white-coated porter came through the front vestibule singing his welcome song:

"Second call fo' dinnah in de dinin' cyar!"

"I'm ready for chuck, though I didn't know it," said Link O'Day. "Come on; we'd better make as much as we can of these feeds on the train. Once we get off it will be a long time before the white napery and crystal glasses of luxurious civilization will greet our eyes. Rather, we will partake of our humble fare from dishes of bark and drink the purling flood of the mountain brook from tin dippers ——"

Link O'Day broke off and looked at his young companion, who was doubled up with mirth. Evidently his ridiculous words had taken the boy's mind completely from his troubles. Perhaps that was the object Link had had in mind.

"Where'd you get it?" laughed Jerry. "*Some* line of talk, believe me!"

"Oh, I was an actor once, and trod the same

hallowed boards on which the great Booth was wont to tread. But, come, let's avaunt to the eats!" And with this, chuckling and in high good humor, the two friends answered the call of hunger.

CHAPTER II

THE FORESTRY SERVICE

After another long day's ride Jerry King and Link O'Day swung off the train at a town called Taney. They were glad to set foot again on solid earth, yet both were in such splendid physical condition that the trip caused them no real weariness or fatigue.

"Why do we get off here?" Jerry wanted to know. "Don't see many forests around."

"I know you don't," was the answer; "but it's the headquarters of the District Forester and if anything is doing it will happen here. That is, on government work."

"But — but I thought we were going lumbering."

"So did I when we started, but since I had a little time to think on the train, it seems to me that you had better begin your woods study with some theory — and the government is sure long

on that," he said, chuckling a little. "Why, they'd a heap rather prove out a useless theory than save a thousand dollars. It's all a bunch of foolishness for a practical lumberman ——"

"Well, why do you want me to start in with theories if you think they are so useless?" Jerry wanted to know.

"Just a minute, son. I didn't mean to say that. The fact is that the Forestry Service has done wonderful things when it comes to methods of reforestration—preventing forest fires—that is, not letting the lumber be cut ruthlessly. I want you to learn all they know because it won't be taught you in a practical camp, that's sure. I think the Service is too fussy about what they call cruising and estimating. Why, they go over a tract of forest and almost count the pine needles on the trees!"

"I see," said Jerry. "You want me to learn what I can of their good things and leave the bad ones out. Is that it?"

"Yes, but I'm taking a chance; you may not be able to get into the Service at all. I'll have to do some scouting and find out if there's any opening. It's pretty late in the season for any-

thing except fire patrol work and that wouldn't be much help to you."

"What sort do you think would?"

"Either reconnaissance or with the reforestration corps. On fire patrol you are pretty much alone and that won't get you anywheres. You'll need somebody with you who knows, to teach you things. If there's only a patrol job open, we'd better mosey along and see if we can't hit up with a regular logging outfit farther north. But I'll know what's doing by to-morrow night."

Before Jerry had waked the next morning, Link O'Day was out keeping his promise to find out "what's doing." It might have seemed the most sensible thing to go to the Forest Supervisor's office when it opened and ask if there were any jobs to be had, but this method did not appeal to O'Day. If he had been asked why not, very likely he would have said in a disgusted manner that Uncle Sam is too fond of tying things up in red tape and he didn't have time to unravel the knots. At any rate, his footsteps led him directly *away* from the government offices.

Taney was the usual bustling community of

the Northwest, a town that thought like a city and did everything to become a city. It had a chamber of commerce that boosted the place for all it was worth and then some. First it had been a mining camp. The mineral had petered out and the town almost died overnight, only to prove a very lively corpse when a railroad happened by and made of the lumbering opportunities a far greater bonanza than the wildest dreams of the miners who had gone before.

After the first lumbering, which had been done with the profligate waste and damage that always marked the work of the despoilers of our virgin forests, there came a new class of settlers. This time they were permanent ones. They were the farmers who found the land wonderful in its resources. At about the same time, the government, realizing at last how valuable were the timberlands, had reserved as a national park a great tract of mountainous country to the northwest, which, owing to the difficulties of lumbering, the timber hogs had left intact.

Through all this Taney had continued to grow until now its townsmen publicly announced that

Chicago and New York had "nothing on us 'ceptin' possibly a few more grafters of one sort or another."

It was not O'Day's first visit to the bustling town, as was proved by the sureness with which he directed his steps. A few moments' walk brought him to the place he sought.

This was a large corral of high rail fencing, which kept captive an oddly assorted bunch of animals. There were draft horses and burros, mules and bronchos. Moving around among them were several men, feeding and watering.

O'Day climbed up and perched himself on the top rail of the fence and rolled a cigarette. Then, lazily puffing, he gave himself to dreamy contemplation of what lay before his eyes.

For quite a while there was nothing to disturb his musings beyond the shifting of the crowd of horses. This did not bore him, for he was too much the horse lover not to be interested in what he saw. Then the scene began to take on a meaning. A bunch of men rode up and after some of the stock had been led out of the corral and inspected, began to bargain amongst themselves. Finally a man appeared on a showy

calico mustang, whose air of authority marked him as being somewhat out of the ordinary. Although he did not know him, O'Day felt sure that he must be the proprietor of the horse market. So he took advantage of the man's first free moment to approach him.

"How's the burro market round here just now?" he wanted to know.

"Were you thinking o' buyin' or sellin'?" countered the horse dealer, unwilling to commit himself.

"Buying, if anything," was O'Day's answer. "That seems a likely bunch over there at the foot of the corral."

"They air for a fact, but if you should be a-wantin' them, I'm sorry ter say you can't have 'em ——"

"You mean they are sold?"

"Right the first time! One o' the young fellers at the Forestry Service bought 'em yesteddy —— but I shouldn't be a mite surprised if somebuddy brought in some more to-day —— here, where you goin'?"

But he spoke only to O'Day's back, for the man had learned what he wanted to know, and

was on his way back to the center of the town. "I'll be back later perhaps," was what he flung over his shoulder.

Another stroke of luck was to come Link's way and it arrived before he had gone many steps. The stroke was a clap on his shoulder and he turned to look into the smiling face of a slender young chap of perhaps twenty-five.

"Hello, if it isn't old Link O'Day! What in thunder are you doing up this way?"

"Don Mackenzie, by the living mackerel! I'd like to ask you the same question. It's no stunt to happen on an old tramp like me anywheres, but you — why I thought you would have pulled off a corner in the wheat pit by now ——"

"I guess it is a shock for you to run into the fool kid you got out of that rotten mess in Chicago."

"It sure is," commented O'Day. "When I saw you last I never thought you'd ever get far enough away from the Loop to lose sight of it. What's the answer?"

"After you left, I began to do a little thinking for the first time in my life. I'd been brought up a Chicago boy and I guess I'd fallen

into the habit of thinking that money was everything. I figured it out that the easiest way to get it was in the wheat pit and I liked easy ways. So as soon as I quit college I made a bee line for a job in a broker's office. As you know, I was making good at the game——"

"You were, all right, but the game was getting you."

"That's just what I started to dope out and after I'd become used to the unusual exercise of thinking, I decided I'd beat the game to it. Some one suggested forestry and here I am, Don Mackenzie, Forest Ranger, at your service!"

Link O'Day looked the young fellow over from head to toe. He approved of the change that had taken place during the years that had passed since the night he had laid eyes on Mackenzie for the first time. The boy had been in the grip of a bunch of well-dressed crooks who had been trying to flatter him into revealing certain information regarding the activities of his firm of brokers. Link had known one of the men and realized that Don was in danger. On a sudden impulse, having taken a fancy to

the lad, he had followed him home and warned him of the fix he might find himself in. Mackenzie was already in pretty deep, but Link had taken hold of the situation and cleared things up.

"Forest Ranger, eh? Glad to hear it!" exclaimed Link. "You must have worked pretty hard to get that rank in such a short time."

"You bet I did. But the stuff I learned at college helped a lot and once I got started I became so interested in it all that the work was easy. I'm particularly pleased with myself right now — the supervisor has appointed me chief of a reconnaissance party to cruise a big tract up country."

"That's fine work," said O'Day. "It must be you that bought up the bunch of burros I've just seen at the corral?"

"Yep, that's me. I was on my way to round 'em up when I met you. I'd be ready to start if I could only get hold of a packer and another Forest Assistant or two. Enough assistants will blow in, in a day or so, but good packers are mighty scarce. I'm up against it, for I've got to have a man I can depend upon."

"You've got to feed your bunch well if you

expect to get real work out of them, that's sure. You'll be gone quite a while, then?"

"Until it comes on cold. I figure it will be nearly two months or more."

O'Day had been thinking hard as the conversation developed. Suddenly he surprised his friend by popping out:

"How about me? Will you give me that packer's job? I've had a little experience."

"You? You?" stammered the young forester, "you're joking, of course. Link O'Day, of whom I've heard ever since I left Chicago, a packer! The best all-around man in the West — cattle, lumber, mining — a burro puncher for a forestry outfit. Are you kidding me?"

"Not at all," returned the man, a twinkle in his eye. "I'm quite serious. But if you take me on there's a condition attached."

Mackenzie's smiling face fell. "Oh, I knew there had to be a catch in it somewheres. If I could get you it would be entirely too much good luck. Go on; what's the condition?"

O'Day explained to him about Jerry and his plans.

"My condition is that you take the boy along

and teach him what you can about the theory of forestry. Will you do it?"

At this Mackenzie's face grew positively sad.

"I wish I could — but everyone on the party, except the packer and the cook, must be a member of the Service and that means taking a civil service examination. I'll have to start before your young friend could do that."

"Bosh!" ejaculated Link O'Day. "Isn't there an examiner in town?"

"I think so, but ——"

"No buts. If you want me to go along with you, you'll stir that examiner up. He'll get a hurry on if you tell him you're short on assistants and you've got to have this young fellow, won't he?"

"I guess so," said Don rather dubiously, but he was caught into the stream of O'Day's enthusiasm. "Anyhow, I can try."

"That's the ticket!" was his reward. "Come on back to the hotel and have a bite of breakfast with me. You can look over your new assistant then. The burros can wait."

As they walked towards the hotel and food, O'Day learned that the examinations were not

hard and that Mackenzie would coach Jerry on the subjects most likely to be brought up. When they arrived Jerry was waiting, a little puzzled as to what had happened to his chum. When he had introduced Don Mackenzie, O'Day related the happenings of the morning.

"You are sure some hustler," said the boy, gratitude in his tone, "and if Mr. Mackenzie can get me the chance to try the exam, I'll do all I can to make good. The school I went to didn't teach many things but what it did certainly sticks!"

"I guess you'll be all right then," said the Ranger. "What they ask are the elementary things mostly. Come over to my quarters and I'll lend you some books. You'd better spend every spare minute brushing up your three R's."

CHAPTER III

ON RECONNAISSANCE

Don Mackenzie found that the civil service examiner was willing to help things along. Therefore, two days after he had arrived in Taney, Jerry King tackled the examination which, if he passed, would give him another job with Uncle Sam.

He did not fail, for, as he had said, the little he had been taught had been imparted in such a way that it had remained in his mind. The news was brought back to the hotel by Mackenzie who had waited until the examiner had given his verdict.

"You've passed, King," he cried, as he came onto the hotel porch. "It was a close shave but you made it. You're a Forest Assistant now and a member of the Service!"

The suspense was over. Jerry smiled happily for he had made good.

"Fine stuff!" said Link quietly. "But I knew you'd make it, Jerry. Well, Chief," he turned to Mackenzie with a smile, "there's nothing else to keep us from the trail, is there?"

For a moment the young fellow looked startled at the title O'Day had given him. He started to speak, but Link forestalled him.

"You're the boss from now on — remember. I'm just the packer and under your orders as well as Jerry here ——"

"You — you are going along with the party?" said Jerry, surprised. "I didn't know that. Neither of you said anything about it. I thought you planned to go farther north."

"No, you can't get rid of me yet," laughed the man. "Besides, the chief here needed me as well as you to make up his party."

"And it's lucky I've got you," was Don's fervent remark. "Now I'll be sure that we'll have food when we need it. I've been told that the greatest trouble on reconnaissance was the difficulty of getting supplies. Packers seem to be a shiftless and undependable tribe. Well, we'll be off to-morrow as soon as it's light. I want to make our first camp at the township

corner where we start in work. It will take us most of the day to get there."

"We'll be ready. I'll see to the burros to-night."

The start was made without fuss or flurry. O'Day proved to be a master hand at loading the burros with the thousand and one things that were necessary. He was ably assisted by Petey, the cook, to whom this sort of trip evidently was no novelty. He was a solemn cuss, but efficient. Mackenzie and the remainder of his party turned up in good order, and as the morning sun shot up from the horizon the little party got under way.

During the morning, Jerry became acquainted with the fellows who were to be his companions for the next few months.

Mackenzie, the chief, he of course knew and liked. There were three other Rangers — Billy Barksdale, Bob Holland, Bill Rupert, with four assistants, including himself. These assistants were about his own age, while the rangers were older. Only one of the boys, Jack Mays, had been on reconnaissance before. The others were looking forward to it as a lark. Jack

wasn't so optimistic — he had something to say about its being not so much fun as hard work. Still, it was better than fire guard work, he admitted.

It was a tired bunch that limped into the first camp towards evening. But Petey was a quick worker and soon supper was ready and with it their spirits rose. Afterwards, when they were all lounging around the camp fire, whose flames lighted up the overhanging branches, life seemed good.

Before they turned in, Don Mackenzie assigned the men to their jobs for the morrow.

"Billy, you take the plane table and run the base line. Jack will be your rodman. I say, King," he broke off to speak to Jerry, "can you handle an axe?"

As the boy answered in the affirmative, he thought of the forests of wood he had chopped while he was earning his keep and going to school. Could he use an axe!

"Good! Then you string along with Mr. Barksdale. The rest of us will cruise. Except you, O'Day. When we break camp in the morning, go northeast for about two miles and pitch

a permanent camp in the most likely spot. Petey goes with you, of course. That's all. Now who's ready to turn in?"

The vote was unanimous. A few moments later, the party was sleeping away the first night of the job.

The next day Jerry was so busy trying to make good on his share of the work that he did not have much opportunity to pay attention to anything else. Barksdale, the plane table man, was a good fellow but he was anxious to get a start on the base line so that the rangers would not be delayed and therefore he was strictly business. Jerry's job was to cut away any brush that interfered with his chief's sighting through his instrument at the rod held by Jack. Also he was to mark the line by blazing the trees and to cut marks to serve as the stations from which the cruisers started.

By quitting time he was weary and the muscles brought into play by the swinging of the axe were sore. So he was glad to get to camp.

O'Day and Petey had found a level space a little back from a noisy stream. Here they had pitched the tents securely, for it would be ten

days or more before there would be any necessity for moving on the camp. Almost before Jerry was through ducking his head in the water of the brook, a shout came from the cook tent.

"Take it away-y-y!"

This was Petey's substitute for a dinner bell. Everybody seemed to know what it meant, for a moment or so later the whole outfit ravenously attacked the good things he had evolved.

The next day Jerry got his first idea of the purpose of the work in hand. During the morning the brush along the line Mr. Barksdale seemed to be following, was as thick as it had been the day before, but after lunch had been eaten, the dense thickets gave way to the comparative open country of a pine woods. The thick branches of the firs, which kept out the life-giving sun, and the heavy carpet of needles which covered the ground, proved too much of a handicap for any sort of growth to overcome. This condition made it possible for Jerry to relax his labors and pay attention to what his companions were doing.

Mr. Barksdale noticed the interest he was taking and called him.

"Wondering what we're up to?" he asked with a smile. "Stick along here with me until we need some more chopping and I'll try to explain."

"Thanks," said Jerry, pleased that the man he was to work with seemed such a good fellow. "I've had a lot of experience rodding for a transit, but this contraption of yours is a new one on me." He pointed to the square board which stood on a tripod.

"We call it a plane table and it works very much as a transit, except that with it we can make a map as we go along."

"I've carried a transit enough miles to know something about one," commented Jerry. "I've just put in a year as rodman with the Reclamation Service."

"You have?" asked Barksdale with interest. "Well, the experience you've had won't harm you any. That bunch is doing great things. But of course they can't touch us!" Jerry noted the rivalry that evidently existed between the two branches of Uncle Sam's activity for the common good.

"You haven't been with us long enough to

tell, but if you don't say after a month or so we're a better outfit and are doing more worthwhile things, I'll eat my hat." He broke off, then ordered Jerry to put a blaze in a near-by tree and mark it with a station number. When the boy came back he was determined to lead the talk back to the work in hand. He approached, therefore, with a request for further information on the tip of his tongue.

"But, tell me, Mr. Barksdale, how you work the plane table."

"It's mighty simple. You see, I've got a sheet of cross-section paper fastened on the top of the board by thumb tacks. This represents what we call a township or thirty-six square miles. It is the unit of the system of surveying followed by the government."

"But that's a pretty big bit of land. Wouldn't it work out better if there were smaller pieces to go by?"

"Bless you, we have smaller pieces. The township is first divided into its thirty-six square miles, or sections. These sections are in turn divided into quarter sections or plots one-half mile square, and then finally the quarter sections

into four smaller tracts or 'forties,' as they are called because they work out at forty acres each. In cruising you'll find that you'll be more bothered about the forties than the townships. The old saying might be changed a little —— Look out for the forties and the townships will look out for themselves!

"The sections are numbered as you see, from Number One in the northeast corner west to the northwest corner and then back east and then again west and east until you get to Number Thirty-six, which is the southeast corner."

"But have the 'forties' any special numbers?" inquired Jerry.

"No. We know 'em by the way they lie. This one in the very corner would be called the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter — and so on."

"I see," said Jerry. "Everything starts from the northeast on a survey."

"That's right. But I'd advise you to make very sure that you remember what I've just told you, for the Chief might ask you any time to go to southwest of southwest, section seventeen of township six north. To get there you'll have to

know what he means. But, shucks, I've been explaining the rectangular system of survey instead of telling you about the plane table."

"What's the telescope thing on top?" asked the boy.

"We call it an alidade. You see, it is really two upright sights mounted on a heavy base that I can slide over the top of the table. I've got a telescope attached to one of the sights so I can do long shoots and at the same time compute the distance. It saves time. The way it works is this: Yesterday, when we started in at the corner post — it marked a corner of a township — I set up the board and put a compass on one corner of it. Then I turned the table until the compass showed it was square with the points of north, south, east and west. We call that 'orientating' the board. Then I tacked on the township sheet and placed the alidade on the spot which corresponded to the corner where we stood. Then I sent Jack out with the rod and got a sight on it through the telescope. When I figured the distance he'd gone I put a mark on the map where the rod had been and drew a line to it from the spot

where we began. The base of the alidade marks the direction and besides makes a fine ruler."

Jerry was deeply interested. "Then you can measure distance with the alidade? With a transit we used a steel chain."

"You did that because it was necessary for you to get exact distances. For our needs rough measurements are sufficient and we get them by a reading of the rod through the telescope and then doing a simple sum of figures. You'll be surprised, though, when we get to the next marked township corner to find what little error occurs in this way of measurement."

"Just what are we accomplishing now by the use of the plane table?" asked the boy.

"We are running what we call a base line. That is a starting point for the rangers who will cruise the timber on each side of it. I've had you cut a blaze on a tree every quarter mile — that is what we call the stations. They are set where the middle of every tier or column of 'forties' in the section cuts the base line. You will understand more about it when Chief Mackenzie promotes you to cruising on your own hook. Besides that, I am making a rough map

of the country we are going over and checking up the altitudes pretty carefully. Map making is quite simple with the tools we have. Whenever there is some outstanding feature of country, such as a stream or cliff, I send Jack over to it with the rod and take a shot at it through my trusty telescope. When I have the distance, I sketch in the object by means of its special symbol."

"I see," said Jerry. "It's all new stuff as far as I am concerned and I sure want to learn."

"That's the ticket!" approved Mr. Barksdale. "You've got to keep on that way if you want to get ahead at this game. But, hustle up and cut a station in the tree against which Jack is sleeping. I've been talking so much the lazy cub has had a chance to doze."

"I'm awfully sorry——" began Jerry, but Barksdale broke him off with a laugh.

"Don't worry about that. If I've helped you to understand what you're doing, you'll make up in better work for the delay. Run along!"

CHAPTER IV

O'DAY'S STORY

O'Day had arranged things so that Jerry bunked in the same tent with him.

"When I make trips for grub you'll have to hold down the chateau yourself," he warned the boy when he proposed it. "And a tent mate's a comfort when the timber wolves begin howling late at night."

"Don't let's worry about that," was Jerry's reply. "I'd rather be with you while you're here even if I'm scared green when you're gone."

"If that's the way you feel about it, I reckon a few wolf howls are not going to scare you much," commented Link, secretly much pleased.

One night, after the party had been out a week or two, Link and Jerry strolled away from the camp fire and happened on a mossy bank overlooking a moonlit canyon. They fell into

talk and for one reason or another the conversation shifted around to the boy's life in Chicago.

"The name 'Tim Fallon' has been bothering me," said O'Day, holding his head in his hands. "Seems familiar somehow. As if I'd known it before."

"Think hard," begged Jerry. "If you had known him you might have known something about me!"

"I can't place him. I'm sorry, lad, but it just won't come. Perhaps it will flash on me later. I hope so. But I've been in Chicago many times and I ran across a lot of queer people. Besides, the name isn't very unusual."

"No, it isn't." Jerry was downcast, for his hopes had been high for a moment. "Well, I might just as well forget all that. I'll never know who I am really. What difference does it make anyway?" he finished bravely.

"None," stated the man with emphasis. He too felt that the matter was hopeless and realized that Jerry would be much better off if he could forget the whole thing. Therefore he determined to help keep his mind off it. "To tell you the truth, you might not be as happy as you

are now if you found out what you want to know."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Your family might not be much better than the Fallons — probably worse, because they let you go to the cabman."

"I see," said Jerry, thoughtfully.

"Also they might be like mine were. My family drove me away from home when I wasn't much older than you are now."

"Tell me about it," begged the boy eagerly.

Perhaps it was the growing affection he felt for the boy or perhaps he thought it might take Jerry's mind off his own troubles, that led Link O'Day to tell the story. In all likelihood it was a little of both that unlocked his lips.

"All right, I will, although I've kept it to myself so long that I've almost forgotten it. I was born in one of the New England villages that cluster around the deep harbors which sheltered the vessels of the great whaling fleets before the trade died out. You've never seen the ocean, have you?"

"No, but it must be something like the lake at Chicago ——"

"Nothing at all like it," was the rejoinder. "The lake is a duck pond compared to the real thing. But that doesn't matter. Anyhow, like all the other children of the place, I grew up with the love of the sea deep in me. I knew how to sail a boat, for my father owned a fleet of fishing schooners, and about the first thing I remember was feeling the lift and fall of the waves. What wonderful times I had! Then came trouble. My father died and my mother, who had my little brother to take care of, sent me to a farmer uncle, who lived in Illinois. He had promised me a good home, but it turned out to be a good job — for him. He had not asked me to come from any charitable impulse, but because he saw a way to get a farmhand without having to pay wages."

"Why didn't you go home when you found what sort of a place it was going to be?" asked Jerry.

"I was too proud. Besides, I knew my mother had all she could do to get along without bothering about me. I stuck it out for several years, but at last I could stand it no longer. I was homesick for the sea and all the broad clean

space it represented. The farm was a narrow, dirty place and I hated it.

"Then, one day, my uncle did something so mean and little and unjust that when it was added to all the mean and petty and unjust things he had done before, it seemed too much to bear. I left. Without a word, I struck out across country until I reached one of the branches of the Mississippi River. I was lucky enough to get a job on a timber raft that took me well down the river. Then, when it broke up, I made my way to New Orleans as best I could, sometimes on foot, but mostly on some sort of river craft.

"At New Orleans I wrote to my mother and waited long enough, as I thought, to get an answer. It did not come and I shipped on a schooner bound for Boston. It was my first voyage and it was a long one. Off Hatteras we ran into a gale that drove us far off shore and we fought head winds all the rest of the way.

"When the crew was paid off in Boston, I made tracks for my old home, only to find that while I'd been on the water, my mother had

died." O'Day's voice was still for a moment. Then he went on. "My little brother had been sent to the uncle I had left so recently. I was sorry for the kid, but it was the only place for him. As soon as I could, I left and went back to the sea. I shipped to the far East and knocked around on the Seven Seas. As I grew older I worked up until I was able to hold down a second mate's berth."

"But — but you didn't stick to the sea," said the boy, puzzled.

"Evidently not," laughed Link, "for here I am, packing grub for a forestry outfit. No, much as I loved it, I quit. The way of it was this: I'd been on a packet that brought up to Frisco as cargo a selected strain of Australian cattle. I learned later it was because some of the more progressive cattlemen wanted to improve the breed of the longhorns on their ranges that they had sent so far away for new stock. When we docked I had to boss the discharging of the cattle. I was sore about it too, as I wanted to get ashore and start to blow in the money I'd earned. Oh, I was a regular sailor then, I'm ashamed to say. Anyhow, the cattle-

man who came to take charge of the herd struck up an acquaintanceship with me — seemed to think I paid a little more attention than most mates to making it as easy as possible for the cattle. At last the job was done and I streaked it for the rum joints.

"Three days later I — I woke up to find myself in jail. There has been a fight in a saloon and someone had been shot. They said I had done it and, as far as I knew, I might have. My money was gone and I hadn't a friend. Or, at least, I didn't know I had one."

"The cattleman?" breathed Jerry, tremendously interested. "He came to help you?"

"Yes, Thad Holman came along and he was, is, and ever will be a friend if it's in my power to keep him that way."

"Good for him!" said Jerry, breaking into the long pause that had followed the last remark. "And how was he able to help? You were in a mighty tight place."

"I know it. What Holman did was to find the man who had been shot, and get him the best of doctors and care. Then he waited for the man to have a moment of consciousness.

For three days and nights he never left the wounded man's side. At last, just before the poor devil passed out, he roused and Thad made the most of it. He got a statement that let me out entirely but did not incriminate anyone else. It had been a gang feud and it had served their purpose to have the thing put on me.

"But Holman did not stop there. When I was released he insisted on my coming out to his ranch. I protested, saying he'd done everything for me and that I wasn't going to be any more bother to him. It didn't make any difference; he made me go.

"I must have been a funny sight when I first tried to ride a horse! But the queer thing about it is that once a sailor gets the hang of riding, he makes a wonderful horseman. Something about the balance of your body on a heaving deck is like sitting a bucking bronco.

"Anyhow, after I'd been on the ranch a while I was content with the land and my homesickness for the sea left me, little by little. I'd had my last drop of liquor — my nearness to hanging on account of it showed me what a foolish and worthless thing drink was. Having nothing

to worry about except the work I was doing, I began to do it pretty well and as Holman took rather a special interest in me, I was given the chance of taking the cattle to the stockyards in Chicago. That's how I came to know the Loop so well."

"But you haven't always stayed with Mr. Holman," Jerry put in. "He said you came and went, more often than he liked."

"I know it. The call of the sea would ring too loud in my ears at times and off I'd have to go. Sometimes I'd really go to sea for a voyage or two, but more often some new sort of activity would strike my fancy before I got to a seaport and I'd take a whirl at it out of sheer curiosity. When the job was finished, whatever it was, I'd drift back to Holman's, which was, as you know, about the nearest place to home I had."

"What a wonderful time you must have had!" Jerry exclaimed. "Was it on those trips that you were an actor and all the other things?"

"I wasn't an actor long," laughed Link. "The audience wouldn't let me. Not that I

blame 'em much at that. Yes, Jerry, I have had a crack at pretty much everything, but I haven't had a wonderful time while I was about it. Adventure, new sights, and excitement, I've had all these, but I've been lonely all through it. It's funny that I should have felt that way, for wherever I have been I've had lots of friends."

"I know what you mean," was Jerry's low comment.

"You sure do, you poor kid, and I don't want you to know any more of it, if I can help it."

"You can, if you let me stick around with you," said Jerry. "I — I feel all right when I'm with you — sort of — of like I felt with Mrs. Olson. It's as if you — you were my brother."

"My brother!" said the man softly, "my brother! Why, Jerry, you might be my brother in real fact. That uncle of mine was just mean enough to be capable of turning a kid over to someone to keep, provided he could save money by it!"

"You mean it?" gasped the boy, scarcely

crediting his ears. "You think there's a chance ——"

"Perhaps, but it's a mighty slim one. My mother must have had some money when she died and likely it was sent to that uncle with the baby. When he found you — I mean the baby — was too small to be anything but a trouble, the probable thing was that he farmed the baby — I mean you — out to someone. He'd do anything, that man, to save a dollar!"

"Link, if it was only true!"

"Well, I'm going to make one big effort to find out, anyway. When I make my first trip back for grub, I'll do some telegraphing and see what I can learn. In the meantime ——"

"Yes, Link?"

"In the meantime, let's take it for granted that it's true."

"You mean that we'll pretend we're brothers?"

"If you want to."

"Do I? Oh, Link!"

The exclamation needed no explaining. It was the cry of a kid's heart starving for affection. O'Day's eyes were suspiciously moist as

he gripped the boy's hand and patted him on the shoulder.

"You're the sort of brother I'd like, Jerry, my lad!"

CHAPTER V

CRUISING

After the talk with O'Day on the moonlight night, Jerry was in high spirits. Only a few times before in his life had he felt the future was so bright, and it had a direct result in the increased efficiency with which he went about his work. He had been interested before, now he was full of enthusiasm and practically tireless.

It was not long before his industry brought him to the attention of Don Mackenzie, who naturally had been giving most of his time to the systematizing of the work of the party and had had little opportunity to observe the work of the individuals of which it was made up.

One night, just before Jerry turned in, he was surprised to hear Mackenzie call:

"King!"

"Yes, sir," he answered, turning back towards the camp fire.

"You're to go out with Bill Rupert to-morrow. Good night."

Mackenzie had stepped away towards his tent before Jerry's mind got back to normal working order, so the boy had no time to say a word of thanks for the chance that had been given him. He had not expected to be put on ranger work so soon. It was rare good fortune that he had. His first thought was to tell Link O'Day what the morrow was to bring to him and then he realized that Link was not there to tell. The man had been gone since early morning on his first trip "outside" to bring in the fresh stores that were needed.

"Well, it will be a surprise for him when he gets back," thought Jerry, "'specially so as he will find me a full-fledged cruiser by then."

But a horrible doubt seized him. "That is, I will be if — if I make good. But I *will* make good or break a leg!"

The next morning he was singled out by big Bill Rupert, a middle-aged chap who, while he knew the forest like a book, had never been able to raise himself beyond the rank of a ranger, probably because the leadership quality

was lacking in him. Before they started out, Jerry noticed that his place with the base line crew had been taken by a chap called Randolph Blair, who had been tried out as a cruiser at the beginning of the trip. Jerry wondered if this fellow had failed to make good, and breathed a little prayer that he would not fail too.

With his instructor he walked along the base line until Rupert signaled a stop beside one of the stations Jerry had set himself.

"We'll start here and cruise north," said the man simply, setting his Jacob's staff into the ground and screwing a field compass on its top. "The most difficult thing for you to learn at first will be pacing the distances, so you had better not bother about anything else for a time."

As he spoke, he pulled around the clocklike affair that was slung over his shoulder by a strap and began to tinker with it.

"That's a pretty big clock to carry all over the place," ventured Jerry.

Rupert laughed heartily.

"Clock? That's rich! It's an aneroid barom-

eter and it's all we have to go by to get the elevation above sea level. You see, I set it by the figures Billy Barksdale has marked on the station and then as I carry it up or down hill the difference in air pressure makes the hand register the approximate rise or fall in feet. See?"

Jerry did not entirely understand, but he determined he would take the first opportunity of learning more of the theory of air pressure.

"I think so," he answered, "but I hope it will be more accurate than I think this pacing of distances is likely to be. Seems to me that just counting your steps is a rather rough way of measuring."

"It comes out a lot closer than you think."

"Then, too, a tall man takes longer steps than a short one——"

"I know it, but there's a way to correct that. Caesar, or one of those old Roman chaps, found it out. Almost every man takes a shorter step with one foot than the other, but it is true practically of everybody that two natural steps together equal exactly the man's own height. What do you know about that?"

"Then all you have to know is your height, and count every two steps instead of every one? At the end you multiply your total by your height."

"That's the theory, but as you get in practice you'll be able to tell by how many inches you are likely to miss three feet to a step. It's just practice, that's all. Let's start. I'll run the line and keep the notebook; it's up to you to let me know how far we've gone. Remember we are cutting right down the middle of a tier of 'forties' and I'll want to know whenever we strike a forty line. The first one will be ——"

"Oh, I know that! A forty is twenty chains square. That's thirteen hundred and twenty feet and figures out at about four hundred and forty paces ——"

"But there will be lots of stops before you get to the next section. I've got to figure the contour every hundred feet and estimate the timber as I go along. But more of that later. Let's pull our freight!"

At first, Jerry was bothered trying to keep his count straight and got badly balled up, but

the ranger came to his help. Big Bill probably had figured that Jerry would make mistakes and had counted the paces on his own hook, besides making his map and running the line. But as the morning grew older, the thing seemed easier and the boy was able to notice other things than the mechanical counting of the steps he was taking. He was immensely pleased when three times running his count was the same as Rupert's.

It was not until his companion announced that it was lunch time that he realized that he was both hungry and tired.

"Pretty good for a beginner," Bill commented as they sat beside a little brook to eat their sandwiches. "After lunch I'll give you a chance at the notebook and I'll do the pacing."

The first thing they did after lunch, however, was to start back so they could finish at the base line about quitting time. This was done by beginning from the line they had followed out during the morning and pacing off a half mile at a right angle. This maneuver brought them into the middle of the next tier of forties to the east. Then, turning another right angle,

by reading the compass, they were headed back on a line parallel to the one over which they had come out.

"Now your job, King," said Rupert, handing over the notebook, "is to sketch in on the left-hand sheet, which you see is ruled into two subdivisions of a section, the roads, fences, big rocks or anything of unusual interest. Of course, you indicate them by the symbols Barksdale must have taught you."

"I know," said Jerry, "but I'm shaky about these contour lines——"

"They will come easily enough after a little. The way you work it is to take a reading of the barometer every hundred feet and indicate the spot on your map, with the height in feet. Then, when you look on each side of you, try to imagine what shape the shore line of a lake would have if it was lapping at your feet. Then draw that shore line on your map."

"But the estimating of the timber?"

"That only comes with practice. For the first few days I will have to tell you and then you'll get onto it for yourself. Down at the bottom of the page there is space for all sorts

of general remarks — such as the condition of the soil, rocky or otherwise, if there is much fallen timber, could cattle or sheep range here, how much is burnt over, and so on."

It was nervous work at first and Jerry went ahead very slowly, trying not to make more mistakes than he could help. His companion was a great help, for he was patient and did not hurry the beginner.

At last they checked in at the base line and Jerry was much chagrined to find that he was more than four chains to the east in error. But again Rupert laughed at him.

"That's nothing. To tell you the truth, it is pretty good. Sometimes things go wrong to the best of us and we're a lot further out than that. To be within even *two* chains of the station you're aiming at is perfect work. If you should hit it exactly you could be sure that it was by error. But let's see your map."

Jerry handed it over and anxiously awaited the verdict.

"It's pretty rough," said Rupert at last, "and pretty punk, but it's better than I expected. You've got a sort of feel for the work."

And with that, Jerry King had to be content. He was not sure whether his work had been sufficiently promising to earn him another chance the next day and he was in painful suspense until the morning. Would he be shipped back to axing for the base line crew or be allowed to tackle the much more exciting cruising run?

Mackenzie made no sign but Jerry did not breathe freely until he was out of sight of camp with Rupert, starting for the next day's work.

It went better this day and the days that followed and by the time Link O'Day showed up again in camp, Jerry had been entrusted with a run alone.

There was, however, one drawback to the enjoyment of his progress. Ran Blair, the chap who had taken his place on the base line crew, had gone out of his way to be disagreeable. At first it had not seemed worth bothering about. Blair naturally was upset about not making good as a cruiser and resentful of the fellow who had, but Jerry thought Blair's grouch would blow over.

But it didn't. Blair was a hotheaded youth,

who had never been denied anything he wanted and he was convinced that he had been put aside merely to make place for Jerry, who was, he believed, a special protegé of the Chief's.

What had really happened was that Blair, though brilliant, was lazy. He would start out on a run and only go a short distance. Then he would fill his notebook from imagination and "dream in" the map, to show up only at supper time after lazying away the day in the woods.

The only trouble with this scheme was that Mackenzie found it out by chance and instead of firing him, figured that a more fitting punishment would be to put him on a job where he would have to work and work hard.

Blair's tongue was caustic and around the camp fire he gave it full play. The older men chuckled at him, for he was funny at times, and they did not get the undertone of bitterness that was directed at Jerry. But one night just before Link O'Day got back, he went too far. He had been baiting Jerry, commenting on his sudden advancement in a mocking way. Jerry had laughed good-naturedly.

"Yes," said Blair, stung to indiscretion by his inability to get a rise out of Jerry, "it seems to pay to stand in with our burro driver. Talk about graft and pull — why, that jailbird has more influence than ——"

Jerry King did not appear to stand up and leap for the speaker. He left the spot where he was sitting as if shot from a catapult.

"Blair!" he said, keeping his voice under control, "tell the bunch just what sort of a jailbird Link O'Day is. Tell 'em, I say!"

Blair had scrambled to his feet and faced the enraged boy. He was an inch or so taller and appeared a little the huskier of the two. By this time he had regained a measure of control over himself, which he had lost at Jerry's sudden spring.

"And if I don't?" he challenged.

"But you are," returned Jerry, quietly. "And what's coming to you, you'll get anyway."

For a long moment the two stood eye to eye and then Blair turned to the crowd, who had been so surprised by the sudden happening that they had not stirred.

"I said the truth!" cried Ran Blair. "I

heard about it in San Francisco. Link O'Day was arrested for shooting a man in a honk-a-tonk."

"And what did the court decide?" inquired Jerry quietly.

"Court nothing!" flamed up his antagonist. "He got off but who knows whether he should or not——"

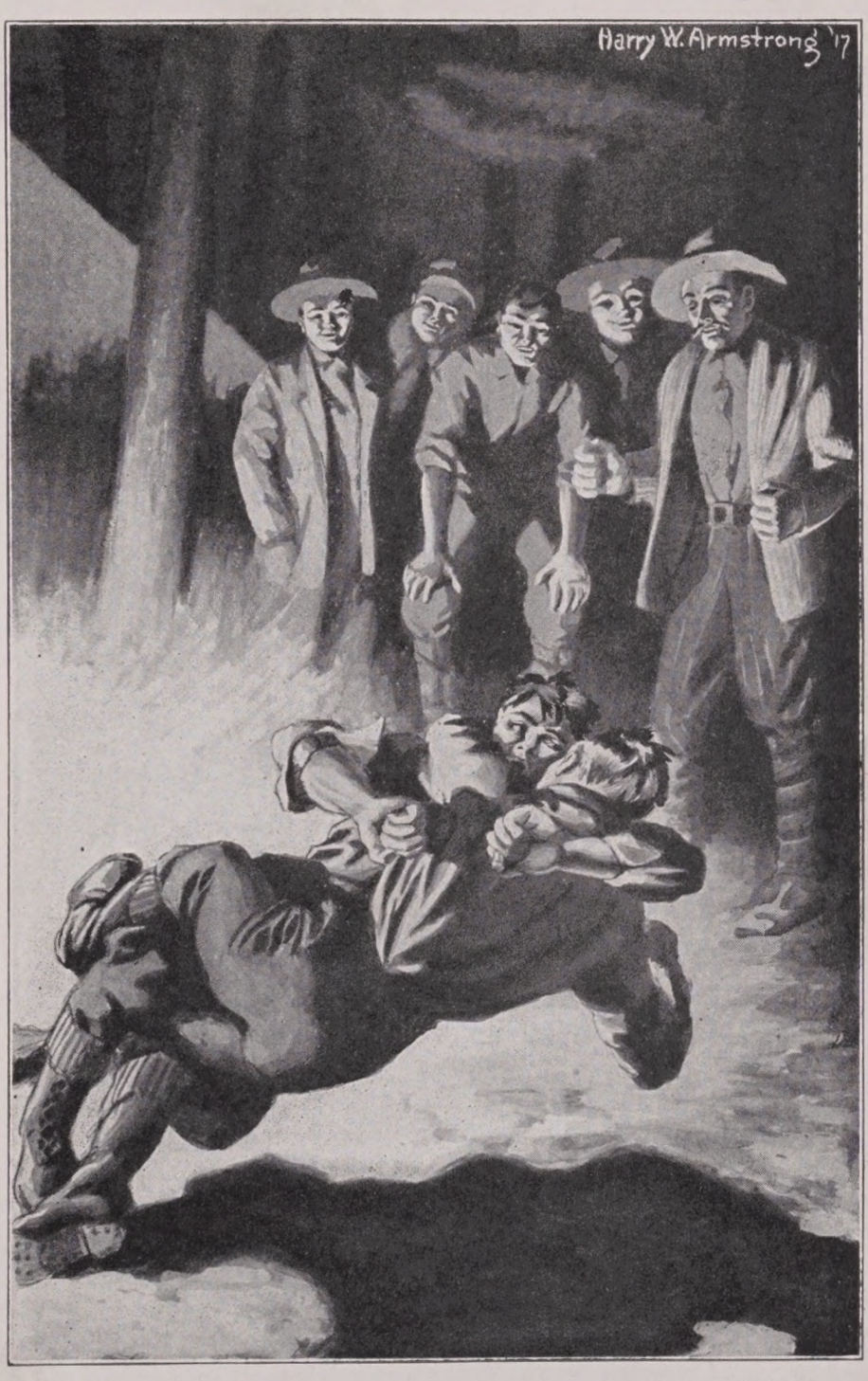
"I do!" boomed out in a deep bass voice. It was Bill Rupert. "What d'ye know about it anyway? You heard some idle gossip and spread it as truth. I was there and I know how Link was falsely accused. There's no stain on him, men. Am I right?"

A chorus of assent went up. Big Bill spoke again — this time to Jerry.

"You told the pup there was something coming to him, lad. Hadn't you better act as delivery boy — now?"

Blair did not wait for further warning. With a rasping breath, he swung at Jerry, landing, luckily, only a glancing blow. Then the battle was on.

It was a brave sight. Deep in the forest, lighted only by the dancing flames of the great



The struggling pair came close to the fire, locked tightly in a clinch. Just at the edge of the rim of light they crashed to the ground.

fire, the fight raged. The extra height of one was offset by the greater ruggedness of the other. There was little science displayed; there was no time for it. One hit and scrambled and tore until one's breath seemed about to burst through one's heaving chest.

Jerry fought for his friend; it was his shining armor. That his friend might be his brother was his mighty sword. Blair fought with the desperation of the one in the wrong who must prove his poor case by victory or be ruined utterly.

The end came swiftly.

The struggling pair came close to the fire, locked tightly in a clinch. Just at the edge of the rim of light they stumbled and crashed to the ground. Slashing, gouging, they rolled towards the flames.

Blair slipped from his opponent's grasp, and staggered to his feet. Wild, mad fury possessed him. With a hoarse cry, he leaped for Jerry, now on his knees, and thrust him towards the blazing logs!

Up to this moment the spectators had let the fight go on without hindrance. Now, at

this cowardly action, they took a hand. Someone, rushing from the shadows, caught Jerry back from the fire, while a mob charged on Blair with a cry of fury.

"*Stop!*" called the man who had rescued Jerry. "Don't kill him!"

It was Mackenzie, the chief. He had gone for a solitary walk and had come back to camp just at this climax.

"What is it?" he demanded in a crisp, hard voice. "Out with it!"

Big Bill Rupert's voice drowned out all the rest. In a few words Mackenzie heard the story. At the end, he made no comment, contenting himself with saying to Ran Blair:

"Report to the supervisor's office in Taney for your time. You are finished with this outfit. And I'd get out of camp pretty early too!"

CHAPTER VI

ON FIRE PATROL

When the bunch turned out for breakfast next morning, Ran Blair was missing. No one mentioned his name but everyone was sure that he had taken the Chief's hint and had dug out for a less dangerous spot while they were still asleep.

Jerry was a handsome specimen when he showed up. It was a little hard to tell whether he had been wrestling with an elephant or been run over by a train. One eye was entirely closed and his lips were puffed to twice their normal size. A few jocular remarks were made about his looks, but in such a manner that the undercurrent of real sympathy and pride was evident. He had gone up a good many notches in the estimation of his comrades. But, as so often is the case with a bunch of rough men, the only way they could show how they felt was by joking about it.

Mackenzie asked Jerry whether he felt up to his run. Although he had a weak hankering for a lazy day in which to let his bruises heal, he would not give in to it.

When he checked in that night, he found himself only a very few feet away from the station he was supposed to tie up to — a much better performance than he had ever given before. When he reported at camp and told his figures, Bill Rupert explained it.

"Sure you did! And why not, with one blind eye? If you'd had both you'd have landed in the next township!"

The boy rather dreaded having to tell Link of the occurrence and he blessed the luck that brought his friend to camp during the day, when he was on his run. O'Day, therefore, got a picturesque but wholly imaginative story from the cook, out of which had been left all reference to what had started the fight. So, when he got back to camp and O'Day started to lecture him on the evils of scrapping, he was much relieved. Then the thing was dropped and neither spoke of it for a long time.

When at last the nights began to grow too

cool for comfort, Mackenzie headed his party around and they worked in towards their starting point. By this time Jerry had become a pretty proficient cruiser and the Chief advised him to take his examination for the rank of ranger. The idea pleased the boy but before he finally decided what he'd do he brought the question up to Link O'Day.

"What do you think about it?"

O'Day hesitated before replying. When he did it was by asking another question.

"Do you like the game well enough to stick it out the rest of your life?"

"It's a good game, Link," hedged Jerry.

"I know that, but the question is, is it good enough for a lifetime?"

"I don't know," Jerry admitted. "I like it, it's a clean, fair business, but — but ——"

"But what?"

"Oh, I don't know. You — you won't be with me, for one thing."

"No, but don't let that influence you. I won't be far away. As it is, I'm not coming back when I make the next trip out. We're so near home, no more grub will be needed. I'm going

up to Canada to a soft wood tract I know of. Think I may do a bit of contract logging."

"And what'll I do?"

"Mackenzie says he's got a fire patrol job that will carry you over the winter if you want it. I'd like you to have a go at it whether you sign up with the Service or not. That part of forestry is the important part. This cruising thing is bunk, as I've told you."

Jerry was about to flare up in defense of the Service, but by this time he had learned that Link's opinion could not be changed. On other things he was the most open-minded man in the world, but he could not or would not grant merit to anything but the theory of reconnaissance work. So Jerry let it pass.

"I guess it's no go, Link," he said after a pause. "I'll stay on fire patrol because you think it's good stuff, but I'll have to pass up the examination. I want to drag along with you!"

"I wanted you to decide that way," said O'Day, smiling, "but I wouldn't influence your decision. It was too important a one for you."

"But when you get settled up in Canada and

there's a place for me, you'll surely send for me?"

"You bet I will! First thing! But in the meantime study up on scaling lumber."

"You mean measuring it after it's been cut?"

"Yes, and everything else you can pick up about logging. Surely there will be some mills in operation in your patrol district. Spend as much of your free time around them as you can." O'Day hesitated for a moment, then went on: "And, Jerry, I may have to go to Chicago before I shoot up to Canada ——"

"You mean about ——"

"Yes, about you — that is, us. I had a telegram that reports some progress."

"Then you have already started to hunt up things?"

"*I* haven't, but I put somebody on the job in Chicago. A friend of mine."

"Tell me some more about it."

"There isn't enough yet. Unless there is more word for me when I get down to Taney I won't even go myself. It's mighty slim evidence so far. Well, lad, let's turn in. I'm starting to-morrow."

After O'Day had gone off for the last time with his burros, Jerry told Don Mackenzie of his decision. To his surprise, the Chief approved.

"Much as I love the Service, Jerry, and as much as it has done for me, I think if I had to choose between it and sticking to a chap like O'Day, I'd pass up the Service."

"But will it make any difference about that job on fire patrol?"

"Not a bit. You can hold it as long as you want and go when you like."

"That's mighty decent of you, Mr. Mackenzie. At any rate, I'll work as hard as I can while I am on the job."

"I know you will, Jerry. I'll see to the job just as soon as we pull in."

He was as good as his word and only a few days later Jerry was learning the ropes as a fire guard, that policeman of the open whose enemy is not the burglar or pickpocket, but the crackling monster of flame. Jerry soon learned that all the national forests are efficiently policed by these guards, and that as intricate a system is worked out for them as for a city.

In the forest supervisor's office is a detailed map on which every outlook point is marked. These points, which are so placed as to command a view of all the surrounding forest, usually are equipped with a telephone, and the guard's duty is to report from each one in his district at certain times. In this way, the main office man makes sure that the guard on patrol is doing his duty and that there is no fire in his neighborhood.

Jerry was assigned a district and it amazed him the number of square miles he was expected to guard. But the explanation was easy. He had eleven outlook points to visit and it took him two days on horseback to cover them all. But from each of these points he could cover an enormous stretch of territory through a telescope. A careful survey would show him the first puff of gray smoke that would mean a fire.

Should he detect such a puff of smoke, his first duty was to telephone to the supervisor's office, reporting the direction it lay from his station and the approximate distance. The supervisor would then get in touch with as

many other stations as possible and learn from them the direction from which they saw the fire. By drawing lines on his map which corresponded in direction to the reports, he could tell exactly the location of the fire, for where the lines crossed, the trouble lay. The next job would be to get firefighters to the scene of action as quickly as possible.

At first Jerry found the loneliness a bit hard to endure. On the cruising party he had been by himself all day, it is true, but at night he could come back to find the crowd around the camp fire ready for any sort of companionship. But as he grew more used to it, he began to like the stillness of the forest, especially when the snow covered everything and he had to make his rounds on snowshoes. It was a hard life but he thrived under it, consoling himself when it was bitterly cold by the thought that it would be colder in Canada when he joined O'Day.

Some small fires happened in his district to relieve the monotony of things, but none of them serious enough to do much damage.

One thing worried him, though. Except for a note that was waiting for him at Taney when

he got in from reconnaissance, he had not heard from Link O'Day. Not for a moment did he think that O'Day had forgotten him, but he was anxious without quite knowing why. This went on for some time and Christmas was near at hand.

What if something had happened to O'Day! Link was an adventurous chap and he might have been hurt. The long tramps through the still woods gave Jerry plenty of time to brood and day by day he worried more. At last, when the suspense became unbearable, he telephoned in to the supervisor's office and asked that a relief should be sent to take his place.

A day or so later he was back in Taney trying to find somebody to whom Link might have confided his destination. He might have gone to Chicago, but Jerry knew there would be no use in trying to trace him there.

But O'Day had not told his plans to everyone and the boy was no better off than he had been in the woods. Thinking the matter hopeless, he started back to report for work.

As he was going into the supervisor's office, Don Mackenzie came out of the door.

"Hello, Jerry. I was wondering where you were. There's a telegram for you upstairs. Christmas greetings, I guess, from —"

But the remainder of the sentence Jerry never heard, for he was rushing up the stairs as hard as he could go. When he came out again, the worry and fear had gone out of his face.

The message was from O'Day, telling him to catch the quickest train he could and join him.

Jerry caught sight of a wreath of holly tied with a red ribbon hanging in a window of a house on the opposite side of the street. Suddenly he realized that it was almost Christmas.

"Some little Christmas present, I got," he said to himself, clutching his precious telegram tight. "Some little Christmas present!"

CHAPTER VII

JERRY STARTS FOR CAMP

The telegram Jerry had received told him to report at the office of "Thomas and Olsen" in the little Canadian town of Pentico. When he had looked up the trains he found he could just about make the journey in time to get to O'Day on Christmas, for it was now the day before. So anxious was he to get sight of Link O'Day before night, that he was asking his way to the lumbermen's office almost before the train had come to a standstill beside Pentico's shanty of a station.

The route given him, he swung out along the street, which was covered with the hard packed snow that would remain there till spring. The wind was still and the sun shone so brightly that the air seemed alive with glistening crystals. Had the boy happened on a thermometer he would hardly have credited the low degree of

temperature it showed, so dry was the cold.

He hurried his steps until he saw that he had come to his goal. On a small building, back of which a great shed rose, was the sign "Thomas and Olsen." Jerry thought it probable that the big building was a sawmill and the little shack the spot from which its activities were directed.

Even in the scant moment he had stopped to take his bearings, the bitter cold had made itself felt and briskly he stepped up to the door and entered. An oldish looking man, who had been bending over a ledger on a tall desk, looked up, seeming a little surprised at the interruption.

"Well?" he inquired in a rather high pitched tone.

"Is — is Mr. O'Day here?"

The bookkeeper looked the boy over before answering.

"So you're the lad O'Day has been expecting." There seemed to be a note of disappointment in his voice. It was as if he had been prepared to see a much finer looking specimen of a chap. "Well, come over to the stove. Mr. Thomas will be here any minute."

"But where's Link O'Day?" Jerry wanted to know.

"He's not here now," was the precise answer. "Mr. Thomas will explain." And with this he went back to his work, leaving the boy to pull a tall stool up to the glowing red iron stove. Here he perched uncomfortably until the mysterious Mr. Thomas should appear, trying the while to think what might have happened to his friend.

He did not have time to conjure up many explanations before a large, red-faced man blustered into the office from the back door. Evidently he had just come from the mill. He caught sight of the lad and came over, asking questions and answering them himself.

"You young King? Sure, since you are here. And in good time too. Must have started right out when you got your partner's telegram. Prompt, that's the ticket, always be prompt. I like it in a young fellow. Your partner will like it too or I miss my guess. He's a great fellow, your partner. I like him, I do for a fact. I never hold a grudge — never. Why, I said to him just before he left ——"

"He's gone somewheres, then? I thought I was to meet him here!" burst in Jerry, determined to stem the flow of genial language that threatened to drown him entirely.

"Oh, yes, yes. He's gone up country to Twenty-nine. I gave him a chance to make some money up there — believe me, the prettiest piece of cutting we've got. As I told you, I liked him, so I made him a nice easy contract for the best piece of cutting I had. Believe me, when I *like* a man, I show it."

As the man clattered along, Jerry found the first pleasant impression he had received, rapidly fading. The joviality and cheeriness seemed somehow not to ring true, but to serve as a mask behind which were hidden motives quite different from the ones he expressed.

By chance Jerry caught sight of the bookkeeper and surprised on his face a smile of cynical amusement. Whether its cause was himself or his employer, Jerry could not tell, yet it added to his sense of uncomfortableness. As he struggled with these thoughts he managed again to stop the lumberman's monologue with a question:

"But what am I to do? What message did Mr. O'Day leave for me?"

"Why you're to follow him to his camp and scale for him and run the commissary, I guess. He wants you to get to him just as quickly as ever you can——"

"And I want to be with him just as quickly," Jerry cut in. "How do I get there?"

Thomas gave him the necessary directions but only in piecemeal fashion. The man liked to hear himself talk and especially so when he was talking about what a fine fellow he himself was. But finally the boy escaped in time to catch the jerkwater train that would carry him the greater part of the distance.

As he rode through the snow-covered country, his thoughts were full of his interview with Thomas. There was nothing definite on which he could hang his dislike and fear of the man. He suddenly realized that fear was a portion of the feeling of repulsion he had undergone; not physical fear, but the fear of the unknown.

"It's a lot of bunk!" he thought to himself. "I'm a fool kid. Why shouldn't Thomas have tried to be pleasant to me? Perhaps he meant

it." While this sounded like good sense, it was no use; his mind refused to accept Thomas at face value. Thomas was trying to hide something; Thomas was an enemy. But why should he be? What was the reason? Thomas did not know him from Adam!

Then in a flash an idea came that seemed to be the most likely solution of the matter. Wasn't Thomas up to some queer game with Link O'Day? Perhaps the man had been so careful to try to make a good impression because he knew that Link thought a good deal of Jerry and might possibly be guided by him.

This seemed the most feasible explanation, but it was beyond the boy to figure out what particular thing Thomas had up his sleeve. Many possibilities occurred to him, but he did not know enough about the whole thing to trust any of his ideas. Therefore he dismissed the happening from his mind as best he could until the time he would be able to talk it over at length with Link O'Day. As the wheels clicked over the rail-joints and the car jounced over the uneven track, his mind dwelt on the new job.

The long afternoon spun itself out while the

boy grew more fidgety. Thomas had told him that he could get to Twenty-nine by nightfall if things went well. There was a horrid suspicion growing in his mind that things weren't going well and that he'd not get to camp that night, for the train kept stopping and seemed to go slower and slower between stops.

He knew that when the train he was on could go no further he was to change to a narrow-gauge logging train for a fifteen-mile jaunt. From there it was a hike on foot to Twenty-nine through the woods. Thomas had told him that there were certain to be some woodsmen on the logging train bound for his destination, who would pilot him the last fifteen miles, even if no one from camp was down to meet the train.

There were only two or three passengers besides himself in the smoky day coach when the engine snorted and stopped with a hissing sound that seemed like a sigh of relief at the end of a hard job, done well. They piled out into a little town of which only the lights could be seen in the thick darkness.

From the shouting and music of a mechanical piano that came from a low shack a little more

brightly lighted than the others, Jerry felt sure it was a saloon. Probably, too, it was the only place he could get a bite to eat, and he was famished. He asked the telegraph operator, who relieved his mind by telling him that he could get a snack at the only boarding house the town afforded and still be in time to catch the "shoo-fly" as he called the woods railroad.

He was late at the table and had it practically to himself. The landlady, a motherly Irish-woman called Mrs. Lajeune — she had married a Canuck — heaped his plate and told him of the falling tree that had made a widow of her. But with all her talking, she saw that his plate was kept full. It was a better dinner than most, she explained, seeing it was Christmas Day. But at last he could be urged to eat no more. After settling his bill he made for the siding where he had been told the train awaited him.

This was an even more primitive train than those which had been run by the government on the Reclamation Service. There, at least, some sort of passenger coach had been provided for the chance traveler. No coach met his eye when he came up to the puffing, fussy little

locomotive. Coupled to it was only a miniature freight car with an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling and a rough bench lining the walls.

As he hopped in through the side door he was glad to see that a red-hot iron stove had been installed in a corner. He made for it and settled himself to wait for the start.

The heat, on top of the big dinner he had eaten, made him drowsy and he slipped off into a doze, which was only broken by the entrance of the first of his fellow passengers.

It was his first sight of the real woodsman. He was surprised to find that they were not all great giants of men, as what little he had heard of their prowess and strength had led him to believe. On the contrary, for the most part they seemed shorter than most men, although Jerry realized this might be accounted for by their thick, heavy clothing, which made them all so ridiculously fat, thus taking away from their height.

Soon they filled the car, a jovial crowd made up of many men talking queer dialects. For the most part they were in high good humor except that Jerry gathered they considered it

a sin and a shame that the little train did not leave later, thereby giving them more time for their celebration of Christmas.

The whistle tooted and a few stragglers piled in before the side door was shoved shut behind them. With a creak the car began to move. It was not until things had settled down that anyone paid any attention to Jerry King.

"Ho! What is it we have here?" was the shout that marked his discovery as a new face. It came from a swarthy little man who had secured a place near the stove. "It is a newcomer! Who are you, my brave?" he asked with a gust of laughter. "A woodsman?"

"I don't just know," Jerry came back with a laugh. "I'm going to Twenty-nine ——"

"You'll be a woodsman all right when you come back, kid," a heavy voice announced from a corner. "It's a tough camp, ain't it, Pierre?"

Pierre seemed to be the first speaker, for he answered:

"Not so bad, not so bad. Moreover we got good bossman. Perhaps you have come for to be scaler, no?"

"Mr. O'Day sent for me," answered Jerry.

"I don't know what my job is to be. Are you going to Twenty-nine too?"

The French Canadian nodded.

"Then I can go along with you. I don't know where to get off."

"You must have no worry about that, my brave, for a great bunch of men they get off too."

But after this no more attention was paid him, for a fight had suddenly begun at the other end of the car. It was pretty while it lasted, but there was not room for the sort of fighting these men liked and soon hostilities came to an end. Then someone started one of the myriad chanteys of the woods, and the stifling little car, already full of the smoke of evil smelling pipes, rocked with the volume of sound. Jerry sat back, keenly enjoying the scene. He had seen rough life and a lot of it, but here was something different. It seemed to him that these men were finer, more wholesome than the people he had come in contact with before. Perhaps it was because their work was in the wilderness of nature — cities had not had a chance to spoil them.

A song stopped in the middle as the jerky motion of the train ceased. The door was slid back a little and a man, evidently the conductor, ordered that one man should come out at a time. This was done in order to collect the fare. If they couldn't pay they had to go to the end of the line.

One chap evidently had been cleaned out and did not have money enough to pay his way. He sidled to the door amid the jeers of the rest of the passengers and just as the door was about to be closed, sprang clear over the head of the conductor. Probably he would have got away had he not been unlucky enough to land in a deep snowdrift, from which he tried hard to wallow his way out. But the conductor caught him as he still floundered and marched him back to the car, hoisted him in and slammed the door. Until the next station was reached the shame-faced husky was unmercifully joshed, only to have enough ransom money laughingly forced on him as the train came to a new stop.

This was the getting off place for Twenty-nine and Jerry followed Pierre out into the clear moonlight night. There was no sign of a sta-

tion, merely a number of huge uneven pyramids of snow, which Jerry at once recognized as logs piled against the time the logging train could handle them.

The group of men that had tumbled off the car waited until it had puffed off before starting on their hike to camp. Pierre led the way and after a few moments of soft going, their feet struck the hard frozen surface of a sledding road.

The men sang as they strode briskly along and Jerry, who did not know the words, whistled the air as best he could. The scene they were passing through was marvelous. The full moon poured its light in amongst the trees and made each ice-covered branch twinkle like a forest of candle-lit Christmas trees.

When a twinkling little yellow light appeared ahead Jerry King could not believe that they had come the three miles Pierre had stated the camp was from the railroad.

Instinctively they quickened their pace and not long after burst into the biggest building of the group of snow covered habitations called "Camp Twenty-nine."

CHAPTER VIII

CAMP TWENTY-NINE

The sudden warmth and light were grateful to the boy, who only then realized how cold had been the air through which he had come. The room was a larger edition of the box car as far as the dense smoke and crowd of men were concerned, but Jerry discovered its use as his eyes traveled around in search of Link O'Day. Tiers of bunks lined the walls. It was the sleeping place of the camp. When he did not discover his friend at the first glance he took note of what was going on. A wizened old man had been playing a large accordion for a dance and he now sat close up to the stove watching the newcomers, who were taking off their mackinaws preparatory to joining the festivities. A steaming kettle on the stove gave off a pungent odor — it was a Christmas drink of their own brewing. A few scattered attempts

at decoration with holly and mistletoe had been made, but it was rather in the boisterous spirits of the men themselves that the feeling of Christmas was present. With song and dance they were trying to celebrate and perhaps forget their homes, where the celebration might have been more genuine. But it was an old story with them. Logging was done in winter and logging was their job. Probably not one man in the entire bunkhouse really expected ever to be able to spend Christmas with his family.

Without taking off his outer clothing, Jerry went over to the accordion player and asked where Link O'Day might be.

"The boss man? He's been here. I think he's gone to his shack," answered the old fellow and relapsed into his absorption in what was going on.

Jerry realized that everyone was too busy with his own affairs to direct him, so he slipped out the door, determined to find O'Day on his own account.

A light shone in a window at the end of another long building.

"That might be him," thought the boy and

tramped over towards it. When he came to the window he looked in and saw O'Day bending over a table, figuring busily.

He knocked at the door and when the command to enter came, burst in.

"Gee! but I'm glad to be here, Link," he cried, pumping his friend's hand up and down. "I thought I was never going to hear from you. When the telegram came——"

"I sent that when I did not hear from you in answer to a letter I wrote as soon as I signed up for this job."

"You wrote then? I never got it!"

"The mail service in this part of the country is pretty sketchy in the winter time. I guess the letter got lost. Anyway, you're here. I did not think you could make it before to-morrow, so I didn't come down to the station."

"I can explain that. I got so anxious to hear from you that I came into Taney to find out anything I could. Naturally, as I was there when your wire came, I could get off at once. It saved a whole day and brought me here on Christmas Day, a little late — but still in time to say 'Merry Christmas!'"

"And it's some glad I am to see you!" exclaimed the man. "I'd have sent for you before but there did not seem to be any reason for it."

"Did — did you go to Chicago?" asked Jerry, who could wait no longer in his anxiety to learn any possible developments.

"I've got a disappointment for you about that," returned O'Day simply. "My people there wrote me that the clue they thought they had was quite worthless and there was no use whatever in my coming on — yet," he ended hopefully.

"Then they have not given it up as a bad job?"

"Not so's you could notice it. I won't let 'em. We'll get to the bottom of that thing sooner or later, you can just bet your hat. Don't get discouraged for a minute!"

"Well, then, what did you do after you left Taney?"

"I drifted up here over the line and took a look at that bunch of soft wood timber I told you I had in mind. But I couldn't see where there was much chance for a quick turn over there, so

I moseyed around until I heard of this chance. I happened to run into Thomas ——"

"Thomas?" interrupted the boy, but before he could go on with his thought, O'Day had continued:

"Yes, did you see him at Pentico? Fact is, he put me onto this job, where I expect we'll coin a barrel of money. Decent of him too, for the last time we met we had a fuss and I got the better of him. Cattle deal it was. I thought he was sore enough to hate me for life. Glad I was mistaken."

For a minute, Jerry was about to tell Link frankly what sort of an impression the man Thomas had made on him, but refrained when he thought it over. Surely O'Day must be a good judge of men and if he thought Thomas had recovered from his grouch, probably Thomas had. Besides, he had nothing to say of the man except to express an unexplainable dislike and distrust. He felt he had better wait until he had something really definite to show that Thomas still nursed his resentment. Therefore, all he said was "Fine! Tell me about it."

O'Day lighted his pipe before answering. Then as he blew out a great cloud of smoke, he said:

"It's great, kid, to have you here, if only because I now have someone to spill all my plans to. I don't like to have things bottled up inside — they bother me. So you'll have to be the goat, whether you want to or not."

"Shoot, Link, I'm only glad you want to tell me things."

"All right, then. Here's the way of it. I've never cared much about money beyond having enough from day to day and I always managed to get that if not much more. Now that I've sort of adopted you as a brother, I realize that I need a lot more — you might like to go to college perhaps."

For a moment Jerry did not know what to say. He had not imagined that this new venture of the man's had anything to do with him or that the bond of possible brotherhood between them meant so much to O'Day. But he knew that if he did not take the suggestion in the way Link had made it, he would hurt the man terribly.

"I would like it a lot," he said, "but it seems to me I ought to earn my way——"

"You will, don't worry about that," was the rejoinder. "But I said that only to show you why I felt it was time I was doing something that would bring in a really worth-while reward. You can get it in lumbering if you watch sharp. I'm sure I'll get it here. Thomas seems to think so, anyway."

"If it's so good, why didn't he hang on to it for himself, Link?" Jerry could not help but ask.

"Oh, he will get his all right. He says his firm, Thomas and Olsen, own a whole heap of timber rights up here and they do a lot of cutting themselves, but they can't do it all. So they give out contracts for certain tracts to people like me. I undertake to cut and deliver a certain number of feet at their mill and they agree to pay a certain price for it there. I, of course, have to finance the expense until I can begin to deliver the logs, but that is the reason I get the chance."

But again Jerry had a question to ask.

"Why, then, do you think that Mr. Thomas

is giving you such a good deal if it is a usual thing?"

"Just because this tract is so near the railroad and from the reports and estimates it's such a close stand of timber. The hauling will be little and ——" but Link O'Day broke off and looked at the boy. Then he said, "But what's eating you about Thomas, Jerry? You seem to be as suspicious of him as of a Mexican."

"Oh, nothing," returned Jerry. "I was just trying to understand as clearly as I could. Go ahead."

"I thought you had something against Thomas. He's forgotten that old mess just as I have," laughed O'Day, relieved. "The way of it was this: Thomas was planning to handle this tract himself, but when he found I was looking for something he decided to let me have a whack at it. Bully good of him, I thought it, and I did not want to let him do it until he told me that really it would be a help because he had so many camps under his own direction. But he said this was the best of the lot and when I looked at it I found it mighty good. I had just enough money to see it through, so

I signed up. And," he paused and looked at the boy with twinkling eyes, " right there and then was formed the firm of O'Day and King, Lumbering Contractors!"

" You don't mean that——" stammered the surprised Jerry.

" Yes, I mean that you are a one-quarter partner in this enterprise and I expect you to earn every cent of your share!"

Jerry was overwhelmed at this unexpected development.

" You ought not to have done that, Link," he protested. " I can't possibly be of that much use to you. I'm only a kid——"

" Don't say another word!" commanded the man. " It's my Christmas gift to you and you mustn't look gift horses in the mouth. I'll let you be grateful and all that, but remember that while you are a partner I'm still boss and what I say goes!"

And with this he clapped Jerry on the back, as the boy stammered his thanks, and began to talk of what would be Jerry's duties.

" First of all you're to be the scaler and, secondly, keeper of the van——"

"What's that?" asked the boy.

"It's the name they have in the woods for the commissary store where the men get the little things they need. Each camp has one. You'll be expected to keep all the accounts there and watch the payroll. You'll be an important enough person, all right."

"I sure hope I'll make good," said Jerry, steadily. "I'm going to try hard enough."

"There's no doubt of that," was the hearty comment. "But I'd better show you where you're to bunk. It's getting late."

"Do I go back to the bunk house? I thought maybe ——"

"No, you'll have to stick by the van. All the money is kept there and you'll have to be the watchdog. You'll see enough of the men before you get through. Come on, now; we work to-morrow, so you'll need some sleep."

They had talked so long that all the lights in the bunk house had been put out. The moon had gone below the horizon and the light from the lantern carried by O'Day seemed to pierce the darkness with great difficulty. A few steps carried them to a little shack which stood apart

from the bunk house. O'Day unlocked the door. The yellow light showed a rough counter behind which were shelves piled with tobacco and canned goods. Blanket coats hung from hooks and a pungent smell of cheese filled the air.

"A regular little department store!" said Link.

Jerry laughed as he followed O'Day into the adjoining room, which was fitted with a bunk.

"I haven't got a bed, either," explained the man. "And for a good reason."

"Why?"

"A bunk's a whole lot warmer. Well, Jerry, this is your home for the winter, such as it is."

"It's fine," said the boy, "fine! And — and, Link, I want to thank you for all you've done for me — and for my Christmas present. I — I haven't got anything for you. I left in such a hurry ——"

"You brought me the best present you could when you brought yourself here! Good night," and he left the room before Jerry could come back at him.

CHAPTER IX

A NARROW ESCAPE

When Jerry woke up next morning the sun was high. He jumped out of bed with the terrible conviction that he had overslept and that in all probability his new world had gone about its business without regard to him. He slid into his clothes and went out, to find that the camp was indeed deserted. From the forest came the sound of axes mixed with the shouts of the teamsters, and from the shack in which Link O'Day had his office groaned a wheezy accordion.

He went over and found that the accordion player was the cook, who had left the breakfast things in disorder on the long mess table while he perfected a difficult passage on his instrument.

When Jerry came in he stopped the mournful dirge that was wheezing from under his fingers and looked up.

"So ye got slep' out, did ye? And gettin' a mite peckish, ye came aroun' to see what ol' Penny can do for ye. Well, I reckin I can give ye a bite. Boss said for to let ye sleep till ye got ready to get up, so I saved ye a snack."

And what a snack it was! Great soda biscuits light as a feather; coffee out of a tin cup that seemed to Jerry to be as big as a pail; hunks of bacon — it was a feast.

After he had put away all that he could hold he went in search of Link O'Day. The office failed to reveal him, so Jerry went out into the woods in the direction from which he heard the noises of activity. The first men he chanced to come upon were Pierre, his fellow traveler of the night before, and a big husky Swede called Nils.

They were swinging their double-bitted axes into the trunk of a great tree fully three feet in diameter. It was poetry of motion with an accompaniment of music, for the "tang" as the blade bit into the wood echoed in varying clear notes. Jerry, not wishing to interrupt, stopped at a distance to watch the process. When the chip had been neatly completed, the men picked

up the long cross-cut saw and set it in motion against the wood.

"Whez-zing, zing-whez," it sang. Then, as the flashing band of steel disappeared into the trunk, Pierre signaled a stop and put a wedge into the crack so that the weight of the tree could not bear on the saw and stop its progress. Again the song of the flying teeth and the spurts of dust until some symptom told the men they had done enough. The saw was pulled clear; then, just as Pierre stepped forward and drove home the wedge already set, he caught sight of Jerry King, who, fascinated, was watching the operation.

The boy did not realize that he was standing directly in the line where the tree was destined to fall, but the Frenchman knew it. Already the cracking warned him that the mighty top of the tree was quivering, hesitating before the sad, glorious rush that would mark its end.

The little Frenchman did not hesitate. Woodsmen must act quickly, even if their thoughts lag behind. Possibly it was just instinct that told Pierre it would be useless to call a warning to Jerry, that the boy would probably

run in the wrong direction if his legs were equal to carrying him at all. So, as if shot from a gun, he leaped for the boy, heedless of the shout of warning from Nils.

As he ran, his eye took in the lay of the ground. Just a step or two behind the spot Jerry was standing was a sharp declivity, which to an unaccustomed eye would have meant nothing, for it was filled with drifted snow. Pierre decided to take the only chance that was left him, for he realized that the tree was coming down and coming down fast.

He hit the boy as a full-back hits a runner when his goal line is threatened, and the impetus was sufficient to roll them both over the little cliff into the soft snow of the declivity.

"Down! Down!" screeched the little man, burrowing his way into the snow. "Close to cliff ——"

Jerry was too dazed for anything but obedience. An instant later, it seemed as if the world had dropped on them, shutting out the day and the air.

It was hard to tell whether one was alive or not, so stunning had been the shock. But a

moment later Jerry felt a hand touch his face.

"You all right, my brave?"

"I g-guess so," was the uncertain answer. "I can't move to find out — but you?"

"My arm, it's hurt some, I think, but the good God has let us live — they come now and get us, I think."

So it was. Nils had lifted up his voice when he saw the great tree apparently crash down on top of his partner and the new boy, and a dozen flying axes were chopping away at the mass of branches that formed their prison. But it was evident the rescuers did not believe it possible that anyone could still be alive.

"Too bad," mourned a voice from outside. "That Pierre Lavin, he was a pretty good sort o' Canuck, even if I could pull the saw on him ——"

"Liar, liar!" was the unexpected comment from somewhere in the mass of branches. "Hurry up, let us out, and I'll show that *canaille* of an Irishman 'bout pulling a saw! Bah!"

This was evidence to prove that Pierre was not so crushed that he had no further interest

in the game of strength which had as its object the tiring out of one man by his partner. A challenge would be given and the contestants would each take a handle of the great cross-cut saw and attack a big tree. The man who could not keep up the pace was the loser. They called it "pulling the saw," probably because the tired loser would let the other drag the saw out of his grasp.

The axemen worked the faster when they heard Pierre's defiance. When they learned that Jerry too was still in the land of living, they cheered.

After they had cleared away the litter to a point where they could see the prisoners, they exclaimed at the narrowness of the escape. The edge of the little cliff which formed the declivity had received the blow of the great tree trunk and the declivity itself had proven to be a cave of safety. The wonderful part was that not one of the myriad branches had happened to impale them. As it was, a branch had plunged into the earth between Pierre's body and arm. It had grazed the arm as it came and accounted for the only injury received by either.

At last they were free. Jerry King started to thank the Frenchman for saving his life and was amazed to be interrupted by him and subjected to the worst sort of a tongue lashing.

"That's all right! I don't want for that you should say, 'Thank you, M'sieu Lavin.' I want for that you not be such big fool. You learn something 'bout woods, maybe, in the big book at the school, hein? That do you no good. You first learn keep out of way!"

The other men laughed, and the fiery little Canuck turned on them:

"Shut up your laugh, great types of pigs!" he cried. "I try to tell this new fellow some sense and you laugh! Go back to work, loafers, the show is finish!"

Jerry was surprised at this attitude of Pierre's, but as the days passed he realized it was done only because the little man did not want to be thanked.

The boy came in for a good deal of joshing about being a tenderfoot. He got it from everybody, including Link O'Day. But things like this always pass quickly from the minds of such men as these woodsmen and Jerry helped the

forgetting by being so pleasant about being laughed at and so genuinely anxious to learn the things the men could teach him.

Strangely, or naturally, just as you prefer, it was Pierre Lavin who became the boy's best friend and teacher. Always he would grumble about it and complain that a man was too busy to bother with a kid and a fool to boot, but always he would give the information asked for and more besides. In reality, Pierre Lavin was flattered, and, furthermore, he somehow felt that since he had saved the boy's life, it was his duty to see that Jerry became a good woodsman.

The scaling was easy and it took only common intelligence to run the camp accounts and the van. What Pierre taught Jerry was the actual processes of getting the logs out of the woods.

Jerry learned that a pair of cutters like Pierre and Nils were supposed to cut enough standing timber to keep a team busy, one horse of which would snake out the logs to the edge of the permanent logging road. Here the other horse would, with the assistance of the cant hook or

peavey men, pull the logs up on the skid pile, from which they could easily be loaded onto the great sledges which later would take them to the railroad. Other members of the crew were the swampers, whose duty it was to clear the travoy roads over which the logs were pulled to the skids. These travoy roads were merely trails, yet they had to be clean of any obstructions and as level as possible under the conditions.

Jerry could get through his regular work in a part of the long day and he used the rest of it in the woods with the men. He learned the use of the double-bitted axe and soon could swing it with the same efficiency and lack of unnecessary effort that all the woodsmen had achieved. The cant hook was harder to master, but it came to him at last. By being with the men he learned countless little tricks of woodsmanship that were to prove invaluable to him later on.

There was one thing which interested him greatly and about which he felt he had some knowledge. That was the system of permanent sled roads which would be used after the logs

were cut and piled along its edge. Over it the logs would be hauled to the railroad. The experience he had had with the Forestry Service had taught him of how much importance was the proper planning of these roads. Every additional foot the logs had to be moved cost money and every unnecessary grade they had to climb was expensive.

The principal road had been built by the Thomas and Olsen Company when they had planned to cut this tract themselves. This had been necessary, as the foundation of the road should be laid whenever possible before the snow came. Bridges had to be built and where the bottom was swampy, sapling poles cut and laid crosswise. These were called corduroys.

As far as this road went, Jerry had to admit that it was well planned and executed, but he soon saw that it was not going to be sufficient to take care of the tract O'Day was planning to cut. Unless more main road was built, the distance the logs would have to be dragged over the travoy roads was too great for profit.

He put this view of the matter up to O'Day. The man was busy and although he seemed to

be listening attentively, his thoughts were on the job he had just left. He said he'd look into it, but by the way he said it Jerry realized that Link thought him theorizing.

When after a few days O'Day had not spoken further regarding it, Jerry mentioned it once more, but with no better result. Jerry was a little hurt and let the matter drop, but not before he had spent a few days in tramping over the uncut sections and planning where a road might go if it was needed.

CHAPTER X

THE NEWCOMER

One morning, when Jerry King had totaled up in the office the scaling of the timber cut the previous day, he came across a folded paper which had become mixed with his reports. Smoothing it out, he saw that it was the contract between O'Day and Thomas.

He started to fold it up without reading it and then realized that since Link had made him a partner he had a right to know what they were obligated to. Having eased his conscience, he settled down to try to understand the document.

It was short and at first reading it seemed quite simple and harmless. So Thomas was square and aboveboard in spite of his suspicions! Then, as he thought of Thomas the queer distrustful feeling he had from the first, deepened, so he read the contract again and as he did, his

puzzlement grew. Everything seemed in order; the price of five dollars per thousand feet, merchantable scale at the mill, seemed fair — almost generous, for he understood that few contracts were given like this for more than four dollars per thousand. There was one clause over which he hesitated, but he could not pick any real trouble with it. This was to the effect that any timber which O'Day could not cut or deliver to the mill would again become the property of Thomas and Olsen. As the timber was theirs in the first place, it seemed only fair that such as remained after O'Day had finished should go back to them. Jerry passed this but it vaguely troubled him.

At length he was forced to give up. As far as he could see, the contract was above question. Yet in spite of it, the distrust of Thomas and all his works would not down. He folded the paper, laid it aside to give back to O'Day, and started out with his scaling rod and tablets to check up the day's cut.

Before he could cross the threshold, O'Day stepped in, a smile on his face.

"Things are going great! Pierre Lavin's

crew have cut halfway through Thirty-three!"

"Yes, they started in last night. Fast working bunch."

"I wish all of 'em were as fast, but then we've sure got a fine loyal crew. They all seem to be working their heads off for me. I haven't any kick coming if some of 'em are a little slower than others. But I'm keeping you — where are you bound?"

"For the skids. I have to start scaling early to get it all done before chuck time, since they've been rolling 'em down so fast. But just a minute before I go. Here's that contract of yours — it got scrambled up with my papers somehow."

"I wondered where it was, although I guess I know it by heart," replied O'Day. "Did you read it? I hope so. I want you to know what sort of a deal we're tackling."

"Yes, I did read it."

"Pretty fair sort of an arrangement, I think. What's your notion?"

"I guess it doesn't give us the rotten end of the stick, but, of course, I don't know much about it."

"That's the way I felt, but there's one thing which *could* be dangerous — that provision that we have got to deliver a minimum of four million feet."

"I didn't get that!" exclaimed the boy. "What happens if we don't?"

"Contract's off and we get nothing for our trouble."

"But what's the idea?"

"Thomas has to have some sort of guarantee that we are going to take out most of the timber that's here. It would not pay to let part of this tract wait over until next year and put in another crew for just a few weeks' work. But it's nothing to worry about, for we've got about two million on the skids now if your figures are right. We've got lots of time for the other two million."

"Yes, that's so," said the boy slowly, for he realized that the last two million might come a lot harder than the first two. Link O'Day did not seem to be aware that a serious delay would occur when part of the men would have to be taken off cutting and put on the construction of the extra sledge road.

O'Day did not notice the boy's hesitation and went on to talk of some of the details of the work. Jerry, after a minute or so, escaped to his scaling just a little worried. His intuition made him feel that something was not just as it ought to be, but it was impossible to put his finger on the wrong spot. For a moment he had thought that the provision in the contract that O'Day had told him about was the catch, but O'Day had seemed sure that there would be no difficulty in lumbering the necessary number of feet.

When he got to the first skidway, he forgot his perplexities in the work at hand.

The cant hook men had piled the logs so that it was comparatively easy for him to get at the butts of each of the logs. Across these he laid his slender rule and marked the number of board feet in each on his tablets. After estimating each log he took a short hammer from his belt and with a sharp blow left an impression of the letter "O" on the log. This was to show that the log had been scaled and, when it got to the mill, told what camp it had come from.

It was lively work, for it meant scrambling

up and over the great piles of logs and dodging the new ones as they arrived and were rolled and pried into their appointed places. Then, as soon as one skidway was finished, he moved on to another until he was done with the last one just before the cook's welcome shout told that lunch was ready.

After chuck, since he had finished up his office work in the morning, there was nothing pressing he had to do, and the fancy struck him to go hunting. The snow was crossed by countless tracks of the different woods animals and often he had seen the flash of the white flag of a deer who had ventured in too close to the cutters.

O'Day had a rifle which he had told Jerry he could use when he wanted, but to-day was the first time he had taken advantage of the offer. Stuffing a few cartridges in his pocket, he started off.

A few rods from camp he came on the fresh tracks of a deer that apparently had come that far and turned hurriedly, frightened probably at some chance sight of a man. Jerry had no real idea that he would get a shot at that particular deer, but at least if he followed the trail

it would give him some definite direction in which to go. There was no telling what sort of game he would flush.

But to-day he was not even to have a glimpse of a deer, for not long after he came upon bigger game. The deer tracks had taken him in the general direction of the railroad and at one place veered very close to the road leading from it to camp. It was a surprising thing to see the figure of a man making his way along the road in the direction of Twenty-nine. Jerry could remember no member of the crew who had gone outside and who would be coming back now. It must be a stranger. His curiosity was aroused and, abandoning his rather aimless chase, he stepped out towards the logging road and hailed the plodding wayfarer.

Imagine his surprise when the figure turned at his call and proved to be Randolph Blair.

It was no less a surprise, evidently, for Blair.

"You — you!" he stammered. "What are you doing here?"

"Working," was Jerry's short reply, as he tried to think of some reason why the young fellow who had left the forestry outfit under

such a cloud should turn up here on his way to O'Day's camp. For the road he was following went nowheres else.

"With O'Day?"

"Yes. But what brings you here?" Jerry could not keep from his tone something of the hostility he had had for the newcomer when they last met. Blair felt it and his answer was a little shamefaced.

"I wanted a job — any sort of a job that would feed me. I — I'm ——"

"Hungry?" Jerry interrupted incredulously.

"Yes," confessed the other. "I got fired from Thomas' camp at Fourteen and nobody else will take me on; blacklisted me, I guess. I haven't found a job or much food since. At last I ate what little pride I had left and came here. O'Day knew me, at least."

"You had the nerve to strike him for a job after the things you said about him?" challenged young King, disgusted.

"I — I thought that in all probability no one would tell O'Day what we fought over or why I had to leave. But I might just as well turn around and go back now that you are here. It's

all off, I guess." And, as if there was nothing more to say, he turned and started back the way he had come.

Jerry stood amazed at what he had heard. It was incredible to him that Blair would have had the cheek to believe that the bunch on reconnaissance would have kept quiet about his insinuations against O'Day, just to save Link from annoyance. That he would gamble on his belief being true to the extent of hitting O'Day for a job, was so nervy that a spark of admiration was lit in Jerry's breast. There was something so dejected about the figure going down the road that Jerry was touched in spite of himself.

"Wait a minute!" he called. "I can't let you go hungry," and started off to meet Blair, who had turned at his shout. He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a package of lunch which he had brought with him in case supper time should seem too far off.

Blair almost snatched the food from his hands and ate wolfishly without saying a word. When he had finished he stood up and eyed Jerry a little appealingly.

"I guess you — you won't believe it, but —

but I'm really very grateful — I — I thank you," and off he started again.

"Don't go," said Jerry, "until you tell me what you've been up against. I'd like to hear."

"All right," returned the other with a short laugh. "But it will be poor pay for the grub, I warn you." He hesitated and then went on:

"When Don Mackenzie shoved me out of the Forestry Service, I went back home, but the governor was fed up with me — said I'd been too much trouble to him already and that it was up to me to rustle for myself. Handed me a few dollars and said kindly but finally that home was no place for me until I could come back having made good. I saw that the old man was in earnest this time, so I drifted. He'd often threatened to kick me out but had never quite made good on it. Forestry was all I knew anything about, except a bunch of useless junk I'd picked up in college, so I came up to Canada on a steam schooner and got a job in a big sawmill."

"Why did you leave?" interjected Jerry.

"Got fresh again, I guess. Somehow I always lose my job either because I'm too fresh

or too lazy. I guess I'm just plain worthless. Anyway, I fooled around from place to place and finally landed with Thomas and Olsen. After a little they fired me too and — and here I am. Now I'm going away again and that's all."

Jerry had been thinking pretty hard as the story was told and at its end he came to a decision.

"Why go away? Why not see what Mr. O'Day will do for you?"

"You mean — you mean hit him for a job? Now that I find you here? I'd be crazy!"

"Why?"

"'Cause you would tell him what sort of no account fool I am. What chance would I have?"

"But suppose I don't tell him?"

"You ought to."

"Perhaps. But I've got a hunch that if you can see for yourself that you've been such a crazy galoot you may try to do differently. Am I right?"

Blair looked at the boy with amazement. Here was something he could not understand.

He knew that if he had been in Jerry's shoes he would never have been able to forego his revenge. Particularly such an easy revenge. He was genuinely touched but only for a moment. In that moment he came near blurting out what really was behind his coming. But the selfishness and hardness that he had accumulated was too strong for the impulse of honesty.

"Your hunch is correct," was what he said. "I'm through with that other stuff. If only you'll give me the chance, I'll prove it."

The answer somehow rang rather disappointingly in Jerry's ears, although the words were right. For a flashing second he wondered whether he had acted wisely; whether it had not been better to let Ran Blair work out his own salvation in other scenes. But he threw off this feeling as the two walked back to camp to hunt up Link O'Day, for Blair talked so well and seemed so much in earnest.

As it happened, the camp needed a chore boy whose duties were many and arduous. It was his job to be the first up to light the fires and call the men. He helped the cook and every-

body else. When O'Day offered Blair this job and it was accepted almost with eagerness, Jerry felt better. If Ran was willing to take the humblest job around the place and could make good at it, there certainly was hope for him.

CHAPTER XI

THE STORM GATHERS

The good luck that had been with O'Day's undertaking seemed somehow to fade away with the coming of the new chore boy. Up to that time everything apparently had conspired to make the job a success. The weather had stayed clear and cold; there had been no accidents; the men had been contented and had put their hearts into the work. Consequently the logs seemed to tumble out of the woods as if by magic and the piles on the skidways grow gigantic overnight.

But a change came and the smoothly oiled machine creaked and groaned. First, a heavy snowstorm covered the travoy roads. The snow did not pack easily and both men and horses floundered knee-deep in it. Then a driver fell sick and the new driver, inexperienced, let a great hemlock fall on his team. So crushed were they that it was only kindness to put them out of their agony.

Their loss was bad enough in the money it cost, but it also meant that one whole gang of cutters had to do other work until a new team could be found — and trained teams are not to be had easily in the midst of the lumbering season. It cost O'Day two weeks and a larger sum of money than he liked to think about to replace them.

Then something came over the men themselves to turn them from a happy, singing crowd into a sullen bunch, inclined to grumble over minor troubles.

One day, after this had gone on for some time, Jerry King came back from his scaling, discouraged with the poor total his tablets showed. He found Link waiting for him. There was no smile on his face as he asked Jerry about the total.

"Rotten," replied the boy, "simply rotten when you think what that bunch *can* do!"

"I know it," said O'Day, "and the worst of it is I can't find out what's wrong. I go out with 'em just as much and drive 'em just as hard, but it doesn't do any good. Pierre and Nils seem to keep up the pace, but the rest of

them — I guess they've caught the hookworm! It's getting serious, Jerry. If we keep on being delayed like this we'll have to do some tall scratching to get in that four million. Spring's on its way and we've got to be through cutting before the thaw."

"I know it," said Jerry, "but don't worry. It will work out all right. I've — I've got a suggestion to make," he hesitated to see how O'Day would take it, "that is, if you'd like to hear it."

"Sure — shoot," was the hearty answer.

"Why not stop cutting for a week or so and throw a permanent road up into Forty-two? The stuff they're cutting now is scattered and it's a long travoy besides."

The worried man did not remember that this was the thing that had been suggested to him several times before. Jerry did not remind him of it.

"You think it would pay for the delay? It means no logs out for a week."

"Of course it's a chance, but I think we've got to take it. It won't take so long to build that road, because I've laid out where it can go. There's a stream bed that will take us most of

the way and that means we won't have to dodge tree stumps!"

"Good boy!" cried O'Day, much relieved. "Come along and show me what you've planned out. I'll set the crew at it first thing in the morning. Perhaps a little road-making will give them back some pep for their own job."

When O'Day had looked over the road Jerry had marked by stakes he was enthusiastic, and work on it started as he had promised. Jerry felt that he had scored a victory for the methods of the Forestry Service, for without that training he would never have seen the necessity of his suggestion.

During this time Ran Blair had done the work set for him without complaining, but he did not seem to make friends with any of the men. Once or twice Jerry tried to show that he was willing to forget the past, but Blair evidently did not feel at ease, so Jerry left him alone.

There was some grumbling amongst the men when they were set on the road work, but O'Day would take no back-talk and soon all was going smoothly. The snow had not packed, so the first operation was comparatively easy. It consisted

of plowing the snow with great V-shaped sledges piled high with rocks. This forced the snow to the sides and left clear the hard snow or ice underneath. Then, wherever there seemed the slightest danger of the foundation being weak, sapling poles were laid crosswise to form the corduroy bottom.

After the foundation was clear, the great sprinkler sledge was drawn back and forth over the surface. The water froze almost as soon as it reached the air and formed the hard glassy surface of the road.

When this was finished and the men went back to work, there seemed to be a better spirit present. The crews worked faster and, the new part of the tract being more thickly grown, more logs came to the skidways.

But this did not last long. Again there was grumbling and dissatisfaction amongst the men. Either it was too cold to work, or the food was rotten, or any of a thousand things that ordinarily would not have bothered them in the least.

Jerry could see that Link O'Day was becoming really worried. He would spent long hours

going over the accounts. Particularly he would study the scaling reports and try to make them tell him that all was well.

"If only winter won't break early," he would cry to Jerry, "we'll come out in great shape. But if it does——"

At these times the boy would try to hearten up his friend, but it was too great a task. O'Day felt the responsibility he had taken on keenly and it would be a great calamity for him if he should fail. Never before had he cared really what would be the outcome of anything he had attempted. Perhaps this was why they had usually come out well.

Daily, in spite of all the driving and pushing of the men, the total of the cut grew less and less. The grumbling, too, became more and more of a problem. The men complained of everything. It seemed to Jerry as if they were only seeking something over which they could make serious trouble. All this affected the work terribly. The logs came to the skidways less and less often.

The funny part of it all was that neither O'Day nor Jerry could find the slightest reason

or excuse for the men's behavior. It certainly was not to their advantage to get fired at this time of the year, especially as they would each earn a substantial bonus if they stuck through to the end. The wages were as good as or better than those to be had at any other camp and old Penny's food was famous throughout the woods.

"Things are bad enough without this!" exclaimed Link O'Day after running through one of the infrequent mails that came to the camp. "I should have had a notice to-day that Thad Holman had deposited payroll money in Pentico for us. It's not here."

This was a new source of worry.

"Mr. Holman is in on this with us?"

"Not exactly. I had a few head of cattle on his range and I told him to sell them for me. I can't imagine what's happened."

"Can't you telegraph him?"

"I'll try that and I sure hope I'll get an answer, for it would be bad stuff if I had to go outside to rustle up some cash. Particularly right now when things are in such rotten shape here in camp. It's tough luck all right."

"But we'll beat out old Mister Tough Luck at that," were Jerry's encouraging words, although he was far from feeling them. "You won't have to go away, I know."

"If I do, it will mean a couple of weeks of hard work for *you*."

"For me? Why?"

"You'll have to boss the job besides attending to your own work."

"Do you — you think I can do it?"

"You'll *have* to. And as far as results go, you could hardly do worse than I have in the last month. But, don't worry about it. Perhaps Thad will come to life and I won't have to go. I'll wait until the next mail anyway, but if I don't hear then, it's up to me to rustle for dough."

Somehow, during the few days that elapsed before the next mail would come, Jerry was convinced that they would have no word from Mr. Holman and that the job of handling the men was sure to fall on his shoulders. At first the prospect frightened him a little, it was such a large order. But as he got more used to the idea, he braced his back to it and promised him-

self that he would make good. It was up to him to justify his partner's belief in him.

He came to believe that there was a good chance of his being able to get away with it. The men liked him, for he had never been fresh with them or put on any airs. Pierre Lavin was his friend and Nils, the Swede, was Pierre's bunkie. In all probability he could count on these two for active help in case the rest of the men proved troublesome.

This new development took the greater part of his thoughts. The condition of general unrest in the camp had become almost a matter of course and Jerry puzzled over it only at odd moments.

The mail was due on Monday, but it got to the terminal of the logging railroad Saturday night. O'Day was so anxious to find out what it had brought him that he sent Ran Blair down on the late afternoon train. There was just a possibility that he could get back on the same run that had brought Jerry to camp. Usually the mail was not distributed in time for that train and it waited over until Monday, unless somebody came in for it.

So, when Blair tramped into the office late that night, both Link and Jerry were waiting. They had been killing the long hours with talk of the Reclamation Service and the pleasant warmth of New Mexico. Now, as the messenger entered, they jumped up and O'Day grabbed the packet of letters with a word of thanks. As O'Day started to run through the envelopes, Blair slipped out of the door.

Jerry watched the expression on his friend's face change from hope to worry, and then to desperation.

"It's not here, son," he said at last. "Something has gone wrong."

"Does it mean that you'll have to go?"

"Just that. And quickly too. If I haven't money here to meet next month's payroll, I might just as well quit and say I'm licked. It will be up to you to hold things down, as I told you. Think you can do it?"

He shot out the last question with the speed of a bullet. But Jerry was prepared for it; he had had almost a week to get himself together.

"Yes, sir! If I don't, it won't be because I'm afraid to try!"

"That's the boy!" cried O'Day, delighted with the spirit Jerry had shown. "You'll do it, I know. And I'll get back just as quickly as I can. We'll win yet!"

The next morning before dawn had fully broken, O'Day was traveling towards the railroad behind the swiftest horse in camp, and Jerry King's reign as boss had begun.

The first trial of his authority probably would not be put to the test until the next morning, but already he felt the responsibility that had been put upon him. Therefore he went out and cruised the scene of the past weeks' operations. He wanted to familiarize himself with every detail.

This took the greater part of the day. At last as he was coming back to camp he heard the jingle of sleigh bells and looked up to find coming towards him the sleigh that had taken Link away in the morning.

In it was Pierre Lavin. He pulled up.

"I thought Jim Tresco drove the boss in," was Jerry's surprised greeting. "You went in last night on the shoo-fly ——"

"Sure, that is right. But that Jim when he

gets to the saloon he does not want to go away so soon. He gives me a dollar for to bring back the horse, when me, I want so much to get back quick I am willing to do so for nothing." The Frenchman grinned broadly.

"But why did you want to come back? This is the first time you've been outside since Christmas ——"

"I want to see *you.*"

"Me?"

"Sure. I have something to tell you."

Jerry knew that it must be something of importance — probably of great importance if it would bring a lumberjack back to camp before his time of liberty was up. In a flash it came to him that it was about the job — that Pierre was a friend and loyal.

"What is it?" he managed to say finally.

"That fellow Blair, he goes on shoo-fly with me. Boss O'Day he send him for the mail, hein?"

"Yes — yes!"

"Well, what you think when I tell you he gets the mail but too he has long talk with Mr. Thomas?"

CHAPTER XII

THE STORM BREAKS

As soon as Pierre Lavin had put his question, a great many things became clear to Jerry King.

So Thomas was behind the trouble with the men! Somehow, somewhere, and for some purpose, he was stirring up the discontent.

It was easy to see for what purpose Thomas played the trouble-maker, for if they failed to deliver the minimum number of board feet, the amount already cut would go to him without cost for cutting and would more than even up for the loss of the lumber left standing.

The more he thought about it the surer he became that Thomas had always had from the very start this plan to cheat O'Day out of his earnings. In all probability he had known more of how the timber lay and the difficulties there would be in getting it out than he had seen fit to tell Link O'Day. It was likely, too, that he

had planned on O'Day's not doing so well as he had to start with, and that he had recourse to sowing trouble among the men only when he found that there was every chance of a successful ending to the job.

Ran Blair was the tool with which he had accomplished what he desired to do. The trouble had started just after Blair had hit camp and had grown worse every day since he had been there. It was very simple but it was hard for Jerry to swallow. He did not want to believe that Blair was a traitor, that he had stolen into camp only to destroy it. If it was so, Jerry felt that he was to blame, for it was because he had kept quiet and said nothing to O'Day that the boss had given Blair a job. This was a small point, however, compared with the disappointment he felt that Blair should have proved to be Thomas' messenger. He had thought that Blair really was in earnest about his desire to do better — to make good, and what Pierre had learned seemed to show that it had all been pretense.

"What do you think of that, hein?" Pierre urged, when Jerry remained silent. "Maybeso

it will explain why these men" — he emphasized the word — "are such big babies and work so slow. Maybeso you tell Pierre what you know?"

The boy made a quick decision: He was going to trust this Canuck lumberjack. Pierre and his partner, Nils, the Swede, had not been affected by the unrest which had taken hold of the other men. They had worked as hard or even harder since things had started to go wrong and had taken it as a personal affront when their teamsters did not clear away the logs they had trimmed.

"Yes, Pierre, I'm going to tell you everything I know and suspect. First of all, though, do you know that Boss O'Day will be ruined if this delay goes on?"

A nod signified that the other understood.

"He's a pretty good boss?"

Another nod.

"Good. Then you'll help, if you can?"

"Sure," accompanied with still another nod.

"All right, then. Here's the way of it," and Jerry outlined rapidly what were the conditions of the contract, what he suspected Thomas was up to, and the necessity he saw for some imme-

diate action. When he had finished, Pierre said:

"Just a little, my brave, just a little. Let me think." He puffed silently at his pipe.

"First, of course, we run that type of snake, Blair, out of camp——"

"No," cried Jerry, "not that!"

"For why?" was the quiet question.

"Then — then Thomas will know we suspect and will try some other way of bothering us. As it is, he will go on thinking we suspect nothing!"

"You have reason, my brave. I was mistaken. Blair shall stay but you must keep a close eye on him. Why not make him scaler?"

"That's a good hunch. Then he will have to be with me a lot of the time. But, Pierre, something has got to be done with the men. We've just *got* to make them hustle — besides, I'm afraid they won't like a kid like me bossing them."

"Don't let that make worry for you, if you listen to Pierre. You must not be afraid. If someone start something rough you jump first. Never you let a big lumberjack say the first word. Never give in to him or let him have

favor from you. Work him like a big horse and he will love you. Me, Pierre, I know what I say!"

As he was listening to this authoritative advice, an idea came to Jerry which seemed a good one and likely to fix Pierre's loyalty to him with strong bands.

"I'll remember, Pierre. The idea is if a husky gets gay with me I'm to wallop him with a peavey before saying a word to him. When he's out of the hospital it will be time enough to argue. Is that it?"

"Absolutely!"

"All right then, and in payment for that advice and all the rest of the help you have given me, I want you to be the foreman of the gang."

"Me, Pierre Lavin, the foreman? What's the matter? You crazy? Me, I'm just plain lumberjack——"

"That's enough modesty," laughed the boy. "You're the foreman from now on and we'll see if together we can't drive 'em like they've never been driven before. I want to show Boss O'Day something by the time he gets back!

Now you go on into camp and I'll come later. I'm coming to the bunkhouse to-night and tell the bunch what I've decided to do and I don't want them to think we cooked it up beforehand."

The new foreman was so overcome that he drove off without saying another word. He was pleased way down to the soles of his mucklucks. The boy realized this and it cheered him up, for he felt sure that Pierre would do miracles in order to justify the trust that had been placed in him.

When Jerry got back to camp he hunted up Blair and succeeded in talking to him without showing the disgust he felt.

"Blair, I want you to take charge of the van and the scaling — at least until the boss comes back. How about it?"

The other boy stammered his acceptance and Jerry felt that he was confused and bothered. Probably this was due to the suddenness of the offer and the thought that the change might be due to his being suspected. But as it really meant a promotion there was no way to refuse it and still keep up the idea that he was trying to make good.

"All right, then, that's settled," Jerry said crisply. "Move your stuff over to the van shanty and I'll show you the accounts."

After supper the new boss waited until he saw a light in the van window. It was not his plan to have the talk with the men come off while Ran Blair was in the bunkhouse. He wanted to have them alone without being backed up by the fellow he was sure was the cause of their mutinous spirit.

As he thought of this interview he became more and more convinced that it would prove to be a lot more important than a mere announcement of Pierre's having been made foreman. He had an idea that it might turn out to be the big moment of the job; that on its result the success or failure of Link O'Day and himself might hang.

These woodsmen were like children, easily led by their enthusiasms. Perhaps, if he was big enough to swing it, he might gain their loyalty and undo in a few minutes all the work Blair had done in weeks. At least it was worth trying.

Then, just as he was pulling himself together

to start on his mission, the door of the office opened without any preliminary knock. Jerry turned to see the form of Pierre Lavin, a look of anxiety on his face.

"Put out the light!" came the sharp appeal. "I must not be seen in here!"

The boy did as he was told and a second later they were in darkness.

"What is it? What's up?"

"Mischief, big mischief. Those big fool men they think now is time for to make big trouble. When I get back I find everybody making big talk in the bunkhouse ——"

"Was Blair in it?"

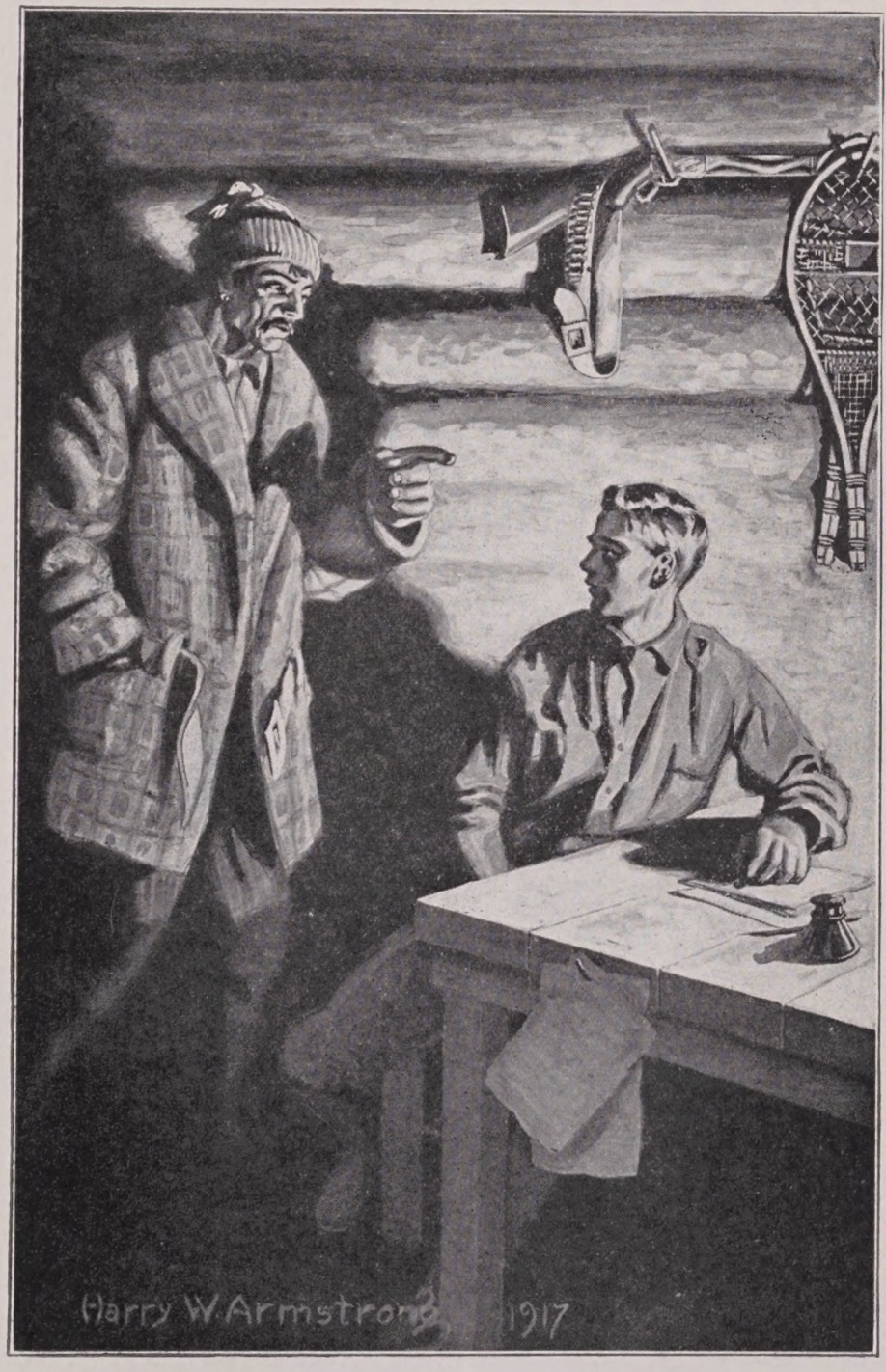
"No, but I think he had been. He's very clever fellow, he don't want to get mixed up in this. Me, I think ol' Penny start it all — but only after Blair start *him*. What you think?"

"Sounds possible. They have been together a lot. But you haven't told me what sort of trouble they are planning."

"They say they do no work to-morrow. No boss here to make 'em, so why go out."

"But then they can be kicked out of camp!"

Jerry was sure that Pierre was shrugging his



"Put out the light!" came the sharp appeal. "I must not be seen in here!"

shoulders, but in the dark he could not see that expressive movement.

"Who's going to do kicking? And what you gain if it is done? Where do we get more men to get out the logs, can you tell me that? No, that is no good. We must make these fools of men *stay* and moreover they must work and work like the devil!"

"You're right. Let me think a minute and see what's to be done——"

But before a second had passed Pierre was talking again.

"Here, Boss Jerry, is what I want to do. I think maybeso it will be a good plan. Nils and me we go and start a roughhouse and beat up that camp. Maybeso they get some sense then."

These savage words came out of the darkness so calmly and seriously that the boy knew Pierre meant what he said. That with Nils he would willingly take on the job of cleaning up the camp and knocking the men into a real desire to do their duty.

It was a brave offer but Jerry saw that the odds were far too great to promise any real chance for success, although at the moment he

would have liked to see a few heads broken. In fact, he wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with Pierre and Nils and help them.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Pierre, but I don't think that will help us any. There are more of 'em over there than we could handle ——"

"Me, I'm not so sure about that!" interrupted the Frenchman savagely.

"But I am," Jerry countered soothingly. "Thanks just the same for the offer. Now, here's what I propose. I'll go over there now as I planned and tell 'em that you're to be boss as far as they are concerned. If it's only a boss they need to make them work, we'll give 'em one. How about that?"

Now it was Pierre Lavin's turn to dissent.

"You must not go to the bunkhouse to-night! No! Somebody has brought in whiskey and they are devils! Those jacks, they will murder you!"

"All the same, I am going!" the boy announced, thrilled with the danger ahead. He knew that the time of his testing had come, that if he let the night pass without taking a

decisive step toward whipping the men into line, that he would be beaten. He was afraid, afraid to the tips of his fingers, yet a greater fear was on him than any physical fear could ever be. It was the fear that he was afraid to go!

"Go back, Pierre; they must not miss you. I am coming as soon as it seems safe. Go!"

But before the door opened, Jerry felt the man's big hand grip his shoulder until it hurt and heard a voice in his ear:

"You are something of a man, my brave! Me, Pierre Lavin, I am proud of you!"

CHAPTER XIII

JERRY RIDES IT OUT

The few minutes that Jerry gave Pierre to get back to the bunkhouse dragged like long hours. It was perhaps the tensest period of time that the boy was likely ever to put in. It is easy enough to jump into danger when there is only time to act; the hard thing is to know what must be faced, have the opportunity to think over what the results are likely to be, and *then* do what is to be done.

That was the job confronting Jerry. It would have been quite easy to have left the office and to have marched to the bunkhouse as soon as he had uttered his determination to go. Now as he thought it over, he knew it would be hard to force himself to start. Doubts assailed him of his ability to handle the situation. Rapidly he was being reduced to a state of funk.

Although he knew if he started now he would

not be giving his new foreman enough time to mingle with the crowd, the necessity of being up and doing or not doing at all, pushed him out of the office into the moonlight.

Now that he was on his way, courage came back with a rush. What he was doing was the only thing to be done. By going through with it he would prove his gratitude for the things Link O'Day had done for him, and his ability to measure up to the responsibility that had been put upon him. The snap in the air made his blood tingle in his veins and by the time he came to the door of the bunkhouse he was almost eager for what might come.

Without hesitating, he pushed open the door, slammed it behind him and stepped into the middle of the floor.

Remembering Pierre's advice of always hitting first, Jerry thought it might work as well with words as with blows. So, before the surprised men could find their tongues he was at it.

"Men," he cried, "I've come over here to tell you who's boss while Mr. O'Day is away. I am! Do you get that? I am the boss and

you," singling out Pierre, "are foreman. If there is anyone here who doesn't like the arrangement I want to know it here and now!"

Evidently the advice he had received was good, for during a whole minute there was no comeback from the men. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Pierre and Nils making their way towards him and a thrill went through him when he realized that their plan was to be near him in case of trouble.

The first shot having gone so well, he determined to try and get a second one in before they came back at him.

"Well, I'm sure glad my plan suits everybody. We'll get along like a happy family after this——"

"We will not!" boomed a great voice from the back of the room. "Where do you get that stuff anyway? Is this camp goin' to be run by a kid and a Canuck?"

Jerry did not wait for an answer from the men. He seemed to flash through the air, hurdle the bench in the center of the room, and catapult against the speaker in one long action. His head came into contact with the

man's stomach with such force that right then and there that particular fight ended. It was big Tim Hanlon, the stable boss, and he had never been over popular, so a snicker went up from the rest of the crowd as he slumped to the floor. But what heartened Jerry more than anything else was a remark he caught as he turned to face the room.

"The nervy little cuss!" someone had said and the boy knew that he had gained ground.

"Has anyone else anything to say?" Jerry asked. If the men laughed all was well, but he knew that if they did not and he was forced to try the rash act of playing Giant Killer again, everything was lost. He could not hope to have the same luck over again. It had been a rash chance he'd taken but it had been the only thing to do at the moment.

The men looked at him standing so cockily in front of them and were amazed at his nerve. Then they thought of the discomforture of Hanlon and they began to snicker and then to laugh. Soon the smoky room was echoing to the roars of laughter that spread like a forest fire.

He had won the first round in his fight with them. After this there was no longer any fear of their disputing his authority. But the hardest part was yet to come. He had to win their confidence, their loyalty to the job, in order to put an end to the delay and discontent.

When the laughter died down, he made his first try.

"You know you fellows will have to put up with me as boss for a couple of weeks."

A chorus of voices assured him that he could be boss forever if he liked. What he had done was the sort of thing that appealed to the woodsmen's sense of bravery and he had won their unfailing loyalty until he should prove himself unworthy of it.

"Well, if you all feel that way about it, I wish you would help me show the real boss when he gets back what we can do. I'd like to get more logs out of the woods the next two weeks than we've ever got out before. Will you help me?"

But there was not the same response this time. The men looked at each other uneasily and were silent.

"What's the matter?" urged Jerry. "There have been a lot of accidents and delays lately but I'll bet we can get over them. What else is bothering you?"

"Why, little boss, the — the grub is — is ——"

"What's the matter with my grub?" shrieked Penny. "I'd like to hear one o' ye lumberjacks pass any loose talk o' my cookin'. Where do ye think y'are, in the Walledorf-Astory? They's lots o' things about this camp that kin be fixed up a heap better, but lay off my grub!"

"I pass you along to Penny," laughed Jerry, eyeing the man who'd been unwise enough to draw on himself the wrath of the cook. "If things aren't right there, he'll see to it. But, men, listen here, I'm going to tell you something and I want you to understand it clearly. If we don't get a million more feet out before the thaw, Boss O'Day goes broke! Are you fellows willing to let that happen? Hasn't he been a good boss to you? Are you going to throw him down?"

It was an impassioned appeal and Jerry saw the men were touched, but yet they kept silent.

It was as if they wanted to let go a shout of approval and willingness to help that somehow stuck in their throats. Jerry felt a great lump rise in his throat. He had failed. He had had his chance and had lost. There was nothing more to do.

In the morning the men would go to work but unwillingly and because they were driven. There would be no real loyalty in their labor, no desire to see the logs roll out because they meant the winning of a race. Just as he was about to move towards the door, to his surprise he saw Pierre Lavin jump to his feet and heard his voice ring out:

"What is it the matter with you types of pigs?" he cried. "Have you no tongues in your heads? Me, I thought you were lumberjacks, men of the woods who loved a fight, a race, things fit for men to love! What is it now? You speak that the grub is rotten, that it's too cold for to do the work! Bah! Women all of you! You hear what Boss Jerry says? Come let us get a million from the woods before the thaw comes! What a game! To run a race with spring itself! That is sport for

men! And you sit silent! Bah! Me, Pierre Lavin, I spit on you!"

For a moment Jerry expected to see the little Canadian buried under a scrambling mass of maddened men, but to his surprise, the crowd made no move. Whether the flashing eye of the man who had flayed them so unmercifully held them quiet, or whether it was their guilty consciences, he was never able to judge.

Just at the moment when it seemed impossible for the tension to endure longer without breaking, the door leading from the messroom opened and Ran Blair stepped in. Instantly everyone's attention turned from Lavin to the newcomer, who stood straight beside the door jamb. His face was pale and his hands worked nervously while his eyes roved over the crowd.

When his glance met Jerry King's, it stopped and held. It was as if he had been hunting for the other boy's eyes before he could speak. For a moment longer he was silent and at last when the words did come they seemed forced and unnatural.

"I — I have been inside there listening to what — what has been going on. I couldn't —

couldn't stand it a minute longer." He took a long breath and seemed to straighten up to at least another inch.

"I — I am the trouble with this camp! I have been the one who has stirred up all the discontent and disloyalty. Because I had a grudge against Jerry King there, I came here and tried to wreck his job for him. I was getting even ——"

"But you told me that Thomas would pay us all a big piece of change if we held up the work," challenged one of the men, forgetting in his excitement that he was committing himself to a crime.

"I know I did but you all were big enough fools to believe it! It was a cinch! You were so easy, it was a shame. Thomas had nothing to do with it. I just used that to make you help my scheme!"

When the men made a rush for Blair they found that Jerry, Pierre and Nils were blocking the way.

"Let him finish!" they shouted and after a moment things were quiet again.

"But why do you tell this now, you fool?"

Jerry cried. "Don't you know they will about kill you?"

"I can't help it. I got so ashamed of myself, so disgusted with the thing I had done, that when I saw the men were holding back from helping you because of the lies I told 'em, I *had* to come out, fix things as best I could, and take the consequences!"

He turned to the crowd of growling lumberjacks.

"Men, I've lied to you! I've been a snake in the grass, willing to bite the people who helped me. It's not to my credit that I'm sorry now. It doesn't make what I've done one bit better. But, for the love of everything good, take out your grudge against me by lumbering for Jerry King with everything that's in you! You must help him win out if only to make good your own disloyalty!"

The pale-faced boy smiled again and held out his hands.

"Now," he said, "I'm ready for whatever you are going to do to me. If you kill me, I guess it's better than I deserve!"

The confession that they had heard was so

unexpected, so staggering that there was some confusion in the men's minds and they hesitated.

But Jerry and Pierre did not. Without saying a word they grabbed Blair and ran him through the door by which he had entered. Nils, too, seemed to know what was expected of him, for he planted himself in front of the closed door ready to delay the mob's progress.

Jerry did not feel safe until he and Pierre had won to the shelter of the van with their companion. Owing to the fact that the cash and accounts were kept here, this shanty was more solidly built and had bars over the windows.

"I reckon we can hold 'em off until they cool down a bit," panted Jerry.

"Maybeso," was Pierre's contribution, glaring at the cowering lad they had snatched from destruction. "But me, I think better perhaps we throw this — this out to 'em. Then they cool off much quicker!"

"We won't do that," returned the young boss of the job. "It would be poor pay for what he's done for us to-night. Unless my guess is dead wrong, the men will work their heads off

from now on. And they wouldn't if Blair hadn't come in when he did."

"But you are always right," agreed the Frenchman, yet there was real regret in his tone.

"Before you kick me out or do anything else with me, I'd like to say one more thing." It was Ran Blair who spoke. "It was true that Thomas told me to bribe the men to hold up the job. He has a grudge against O'Day and it fitted in with the one I had against you, King."

"Then why did you tell the gang it was a lie?" asked Jerry, puzzled.

"Because I wanted to help you as much as I could at the end. If the men think I lied to them they won't give another thought to Thomas. If I hadn't told them that, perhaps some of them would have gone to him. That would have been bad medicine for you. That's all I've got to say except to thank you for getting me away from that bunch. Here they come now!"

They could hear footsteps scrunching in the snow approaching the shanty, but were surprised at the quietness. There was no shouting or yelling.

Finally when the steps had come quite close, a single voice was heard. It was old Penny.

"Boss Jerry, the boys have done got over their mad and they've told me to say what's on their chests. It's this way: If you want for that onery houn' dawg what was my cookee to git away with his face and bones in-tact, he will git away. In fact, the boys want to say that if you was to overlook what they done to you an' Boss O'Day in the past an' say no more about it, why they ain't a thing you can ask 'em but what they'd do. Moresomever, they have gone so far as to say that if they don't git out your million feet for ye, it'll be 'cause each an' every-one o' the lowdown lumberjacks what don't appreciate fine cookin', which the same are not beggin' of their pardons, will be in the hors-pittle! Ain't that so, boys?"

The cheer that echoed through the woods was evidence enough that Penny had expressed their feelings.

Jerry threw open the door and stepped out.

"If you're with me, men, I'm sure with you. What's past is past. Turn in now and let's hit the high spots to-morrow!"

When he came in again there seemed to be a questioning look on Blair's face. Pierre had gone off with the men, so they were alone. Jerry sat down and looked at the other boy steadily. Somehow there seemed to be a change in Blair's face, as if he had grown older, more steady.

"Well, Blair," he questioned at last, "what now?"

"I don't know," said the other miserably. "Of course, I'll go somewheres, but it won't help me any. I guess I'm just plain no good."

"I don't believe that," returned Jerry slowly. Then he shot out a question. "Blair, have you finished with the rough stuff? Are you ready to run straight now?"

"What do you mean?" almost whispered the other boy.

"Are you willing to try to be loyal and work like a man?"

Blair almost sobbed out his answer.

"If ever I do another rotten thing I'll shoot myself!"

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then you go to scaling to-morrow. I'm going to try you out."

Then, before Ran Blair could stammer his thanks, Jerry King had slipped out of the shanty.

CHAPTER XIV

RAN BLAIR'S SCHEME

It was as if an entirely different bunch of men had taken the places of the old gang in the woods. When Jerry King got out on the job the next morning — he had delayed coming from the office shanty purposely in order to let Pierre have a free hand on his first day as foreman — he found the work going as it had never gone before.

Pierre was everywhere, urging, encouraging the men. He evidently felt the dignity and responsibility of his new position, and he was determined to make good.

Jerry came upon him first at one of the skidways, where he was proving that few men could give him pointers on handling a cant hook even if an axe was his particular tool. One of the regular cant hook men had not been moving as quickly as the Frenchman thought he should, so

he had climbed upon the pile and proved his point. When he had finished he joined Jerry and they moved off to another part of the job.

"Well, Pierre, how are things going?"

The new foreman could hardly make his tongue work slow enough to be intelligible. He sputtered and spluttered, but the boy realized that what he was trying to say was that never had men seemed so willing to work and so well fitted to do their jobs. A million feet? Bah! It was nothing! Then he sobered a little and said seriously:

"But that was a big thing you did last night, Boss Jerry. All the men they talk of it to-day. You have made them all your friends, every one!"

"You think so?" said Jerry a little anxiously.

"Yes. To-day you can do anything that you will with them. They would try and go get the moon for you if you say so!"

"I hope so," was Jerry's rejoinder, "because I'm going to ask them to do something I don't think they are going to like very much."

"You just try them! But what is it?"

"After you left me with Blair last night ——"

"Me, I think it better than he has gone away before we get back to camp to-night."

"He won't be gone!"

"What is it you say?"

"He won't be gone! After you left I told him I'd give him another chance — that he could stay on as scaler!"

Pierre looked at his boss with amazement in his eyes. Yet there was something of admiration there too.

"That — that *snake,*" he stammered, "that snake, he's going to remain for to be our scaler? After what he speak that he has done against you and the big boss? Boss Jerry, are you crazy in the head?"

"Perhaps I am. But, Pierre, I think Blair has had enough of crookedness this trip and has learned his lesson. There must be something good in him or he never would have done what he did last night. If he goes out now it will mean he will have to quit this country for good, for what he's done will be talked over in every camp in Canada within a week. I think it's up to us to help him make good. Don't you think so?"

"For me, I do not think so one little bit! But if you want it so, Pierre Lavin will help, don't worry about that."

"Help me then by telling me how to spring it on the men."

Pierre thought for a moment before answering.

"That is one hard nut for to crack," said he at last. "Me, I think maybeso we better not tell the men anything at all. You tell Blair he's to go about his business like nothing has happened. Maybeso if that — that Blair he has got enough nerve, the gang will leave him alone. What you think?"

"Perhaps," was Jerry's rather dubious answer. "That plan's good as any, I guess, but I thought if I should tell the men first ——"

"No!" returned Pierre decidedly. "You have talked enough. Now, if anyone speaks anything to you about this fellow staying, you must tell them so that he stays for no reason except that it is your wish! Lumberjacks, they must not try to think for the boss."

This advice seemed so sound that Jerry adopted it, telling Blair that he was to go out

on the job and do his work, but under no circumstances to get into any argument.

"It's a pretty tough stunt ahead of you," Blair was warned by Jerry King. "The bunch will ride you pretty hard or I miss my guess."

"I'll make a big try at standing whatever they give me," replied the other boy, who had spent the day over the accounts in the van and had not shown himself out on the job. "And what's more, I'll be mighty glad of the chance. I've got a long ways to come back and I want to get started soon!"

"That's the right idea!" Jerry was tickled to find that this was the spirit in which Blair was going ahead. "You'll come out all right."

"I don't — don't quite know how to thank you for what you've ——"

"Cut that part out," Jerry ordered, a little embarrassed. "If you make good and help us get out that lumber in time it will be thanks enough." Then, as a sudden thought struck him, he went on: "But say, Blair, do you think Thomas has any other plan in case you couldn't — I mean, in case we did succeed in getting out the minimum four million?"

"I don't know," was the answer. "He did not tell me anything except what he wanted me to do. I've been thinking that he probably has something else up his sleeve, but what that is, is more than I can tell."

"Well, I'm going over that contract again with a fine tooth comb," half mused Jerry as he went back to the office.

But his rereading of that important document told him no more than he already knew. He found the provision for delivery of the minimum number of feet but everything else seemed right. He tried to tell himself that Thomas might be willing to try and keep them from delivering the logs, but that his grudge against O'Day could not possibly be great enough to make him try any other monkey business if he should fail. But in spite of this, there was a feeling in Jerry that Thomas was quite capable of anything to gain his ends.

But after a day or two, Jerry realized that it was not going to be any too easy for the men to make up for the delay caused by their soldiering and disloyalty. They were working like fiends and so far everything had gone smoothly,

yet there was no telling what might occur or how long they would have before the thaw. Thomas might win out as it stood. It was hard to admit, but there was barely an even chance for them to beat him.

Since Pierre was proving that the time he had spent as an axeman was a sheer waste when he was such a good foreman, and Ran Blair had taken the scaling off his hands, Jerry found that his time was best taken up with planning travoy roads and selecting new bunches of timber to cut.

If a forestry expert had gone over the tract Jerry had cut he would have been shocked, for he would have seen that no attempt had been made to log systematically. Time was driving the boy so he picked out only such clumps of trees as stood together, discarding isolated trees although they might be good timber. As a result of this planning ahead the axemen knew just what was their job and did it without the waste of a precious minute.

As he had predicted, Blair had far from an easy time of it. When he first appeared at the skidways, the men had jeered at him and tried

to provoke a quarrel, but Ran had set his jaw and worked on doggedly. After a day or two of this, they happened on a much more cruel form of showing their displeasure and distrust.

No one said a word to him! Blair might have been cast on a desert island for all the human companionship that came his way. On the job it was not so bad, but at mealtimes or in the bunkhouse, they made the boy suffer. Pierre was only a little help and Ran was too proud to seek out Jerry King to talk to.

Pierre told Jerry of these conditions and often the young boss would go over to the van shanty at night on some errand which was only an excuse to cover his real purpose of talking with Blair. The talk was of many things, but rarely of the work at hand. Jerry was sure that Ran kept off the subject for fear that he would drift into a tale of his own hardships and that it would seem as if he was a quitter.

But one day Blair did not wait for Jerry to show up at the van. Before supper call had sounded, he presented himself at the office, his face flushed with excitement.

"What's up?" said Jerry.

"I — I think I've found out something," sputtered Blair. "There's a way to beat Thomas, even if the thaw catches us!"

"How do you mean?" Jerry demanded eagerly. "You're joking. We are done, finished, gone up the spout entirely if the snow leaves us."

"If my plan is any good," Ran Blair asserted, "the thaw will help us."

The young boss was puzzled. He had no idea what was coming, but somehow the other boy's confident air made him feel as if luck was going to break their way.

"Shoot ahead. Don't keep me guessing," he demanded.

"Righto. Here's the dope. I've spent the last afternoon or so up at the very edge of the tract we are supposed to cut. Thomas showed me the map before I came here, so I know. The way we're headed with the cutting, we'll never be able to get to it this year if we do miracles! And it's a fine piece of close-sitting timber ——"

"I know all about that piece," said Jerry, all hope gone out of his voice. "There's enough

there to make up our million dead easy, but ——"

"But what?"

"Well, a road would have to be cut up there and we haven't got the time to do it. What's the use of cutting the timber if we can't get it to the railroad, I'd like to know."

"But that's just it! We *can* get this to the railroad and without cutting a road either!"

"You're crazy in the head!"

"Just wait a minute," pleaded the excited Blair. "How about floating the logs down? Wouldn't that do it?"

The mystified Jerry stared at his companion.

"Float 'em? On what? Hope?"

"Hope, my eye! Water, Jerry King, water!"

"But there's no stream bigger than a brook up in that country ——"

"Isn't there, indeed? Did you happen to jump across the line of our tract and see what was on the other side?"

"No-o," hesitated Jerry King, "I don't think I did."

"Well, if you had, you would have seen the frozen surface of quite a good sized brook and

when the thaw comes and swells it with melted snow it will be a roaring river!"

"But if it's not on our land how can it help us?"

"What difference does that make? And, anyhow, I think it can be made to come on our land without much trouble."

The training Jerry had had with the Reclamation Service now was useful, for it gave him an inkling of Ran's plan. The idea was to dam the brook and divert the water over their land. So he said:

"There's a place to build a diversion dam?"

"You bet. There is a narrow gorge it runs through and a day's work of the gang will do what we want!"

"That's fine, Blair, fine. I'll go out with you early in the morning and look things over."

The possibility that Blair's plan might be feasible cheered Jerry enormously, for the certainty of failure had been growing in his mind. The change in the men had come too late. They were working together like a great, well-oiled machine, but the machine could not do the impossible and the boy was sure that nothing

less than the impossible would win out for him.

He knew that it was quite possible for the men to cut that big bunch of hemlock that Blair had spoken of in the time that was left, provided they did not have to knock off to do the hauling to the railroad. This cut, with what was already on the skidways, would easily total the necessary number of board feet. If they could cut the logs, travoy them only the short distance to the stream, it would leave the teams free to take the piles of logs now on the skids to the railroad.

The next morning the two boys set out through the white clad forest towards the place Blair had discovered. The latter was in better spirits than he had ever been before. It was as if the fact that he had contributed something constructive to the work had given him back a little self-assurance. This pleased Jerry a lot and he hoped with all his heart that Blair's hunch was workable. If it was, it might mean the saving of the boy's whole life.

It proved to be as Ran had said. A dam could easily be built and then the new stream bed would be across through their tract. From this prospective stream bed rose thickly wooded

hills which would yield a great harvest of logs. Then, too, the travoys would be short and little time need be wasted in hauling.

"Gee whiz!" Jerry ejaculated when he had examined everything. "This looks good to me! But, Blair, there's one thing that bothers me. I don't think we can set the gang building that dam. Somebody might spill and if Thomas got on he'd drive us off. It's on his land."

"That's so," Ran said soberly. Then he brightened up. "But why can't *we* build it — you and I and Pierre and Nils perhaps? We could slip out here at night — the moon's full and we'd have plenty of light!"

"We can! And what's more, we will. And we're going to cut this piece just as you said. I guess the old forestry service teaches a fellow something once in a while!"

"I'd never have thought of it if I hadn't been with that outfit a while, that's sure! But I forgot to tell you the best of it. When we bring this stream through here it will follow a course that goes right smack up to the railroad just a little ways from where our road hits it."

"How do you know?"

"I followed it out yesterday."

"Good for you! If this thing comes out all right it will be because of what you've done ——"

"Nix on that, Jerry, nix on that. If you — you hadn't given me another chance, where would I have been? If this helps any it will be only a little payment on account of what I owe *you!*"

CHAPTER XV

THE BUILDING OF THE DAM

When Jerry got back to the section the men were cutting, he called Pierre aside and told him what he'd seen and that he planned to start cutting in the new place in the morning.

"Clear up here to-day, Pierre," he ordered. "and start the sledges carrying the logs to the railroad. We'll need only half the horses for travoying up there."

At first the Frenchman was dubious about the new venture, but after he had looked the ground over for himself, he was as enthusiastic as the boys. It was plain the men were puzzled when they were set to work in a place from which there seemed no possible way to get the logs to the shipping point, but their enthusiasm for Jerry had not yet worn off and they said nothing. Besides, Pierre kept at their heels so closely that they scarcely had time to do any thinking.

For a few nights Pierre and Nils, Jerry and Blair, worked overtime, but the result of their labor was a serviceable dam. It had been constructed of sapling poles sharpened at one end and laid at an angle against the stream.

"At first she will leak a whole big lot," announced Pierre, when it was done, "but soon as the thaw comes we can put a lot of dirt against it. Then it will be all right."

So busy had Jerry been with all these things, that he did not realize how fast the days were slipping by. Now almost any day might bring Link O'Day back and he would have to give account of what he had done.

What if O'Day should feel that the chance he had taken by coming up to the new section was not justified? With a sinking heart the boy remembered how set Link had been against the theories of the Forestry Service. What he had done was the sort of thing the Service would have said was right — but would O'Day? Perhaps he would rather have gone on in the old way even if it meant failure at last. He expressed something of his worriment to Ran Blair.

"O'Day wouldn't have left you in charge if he wasn't willing to back up anything you might do. Don't worry!"

And Jerry really could not worry much as the jumble of logs grew greater in the valley. The men sang as they worked and there seemed scarcely any intervals between the glorious rushing falls of the great trees. In his imagination Jerry saw the water rising and at last carrying his timber towards its destination. It was a good plan and it was not going to fail.

At the end of two weeks O'Day had not come back, but a note had come saying there was money in the bank for the payroll. It was a relief to know that O'Day's trip had been successful, but Jerry wondered what was keeping his friend. A suspicion that he might have gone on to Chicago flashed into his brain but he could not conceive that O'Day, worried as he must have been over the situation at the camp, would have taken the time just now to go so far away.

However, since he did not come it was up to Jerry to wait, and while he waited, to do as much work as possible. He found his job

easy, for the whole gang had become enthusiastic about the race against time and they needed no urging to tear into their work like famished wolves.

The sledge drivers and loaders were doing their share and the great piles of logs at the skidways melted as the mountain of timber grew along the railroad.

One morning when Jerry happened to be watching the sledges unload, he saw that a frozen stream paralleled the rails.

"This is the stream Blair expects our little river to empty in, I guess," he reflected. "Funny I never noticed it before. I wonder where it goes."

Because of idle curiosity more than anything else, he began to follow its course. The beauty of the country led him on and before he knew it he was far from camp. Hemmed in by the silent, snow-laden trees, the river bed stretched ahead invitingly. Pulled by no tangible reason, he went on. What he expected to find around the next corner, he did not know, yet it was as if something was waiting for him.

But it was not around the next corner or the

one after that. He plodded on, a queer sort of excitement holding him in its grip. His empty stomach told him that it was lunch time but he could not turn back. A little farther on he was glad that he had not listened to the voice of hunger.

Spread before him across the white river bed lay a ridge of snow which was too even in height to be the work of nature. It was a dam!

A glance into the woods showed him that this section had been logged within the past year or two and that this river had been used to drive the logs to the mill. It had been too shallow to float the logs easily, so this dam had been built. In all probability there would be a series of dams farther along until the river became wide and deep enough to make them unnecessary. Jerry knew how this stratagem was worked. The logs were floated behind the first dam until a sufficiently large hill of water had gathered; then they were let loose and the rush of water carried them to the next dam, where the process was repeated.

As the boy had believed, not much farther down the river another dam had been built.

The covering of ice and snow hid the condition it was in, but as the woods were evidence that the lumbering had taken place only a year or two before, the dams ought to be in fair shape.

Jerry did not know of what value the knowledge he had gained would prove to be, yet as he made his way back to camp, he felt he had put in a good day's work.

That night when Pierre came to the office to report the day's activities, Jerry asked:

"Do you know anything about that stream which begins along by the railroad?"

"Sure. When the springtime comes it makes a big river. You see that I make the piles of logs high up on the bank so they will not be washed away."

"I noticed that all right. But what I want to know is where the river goes."

"I think it flows sometime into the great sea, but where I do not know ——"

"That isn't what I mean. I want to know if it hits any sawmill."

"Of a certainty. Now I comprehend. To Thomas and Olsen's. They have used it for the drive in all the cutting they do before last

year. Up here it is become too shallow and they have to use the railroad. Me, I have work for them maybeso two year ago when we use the river. But it was a great hard job when we have to use the dams. Men all cuss when the logs have jam."

"But the dams were successful?"

"Oh, sure. That was the only way we could get the logs out, so what the men say it makes no difference."

This conversation and the discovery that had prompted it, gave Jerry something to think of. He wondered if the head of water they were going to divert through their new channel would be great enough to float their logs to the railroad. There was a chance that the water would spread over the level places and become so shallow that it would leave their precious timber stranded. He had not thought of this possibility in the skelter of excitement.

Therefore, the first free moment he had the next day he used in going over what would be the course of their new stream. For the most part it followed a little valley whose steep sides would force the water into a narrow and

deep channel. But at last this ideal condition ended and the gulch widened out. Jerry went back to camp and fetched Ran Blair to the scene.

"Another job of dam-building for us, I reckon," said Jerry. "And it's going to hurt like the dickens to take the men off the cutting. This isn't a job we can do in off times."

"You're right," Blair assented. "I didn't think this would be necessary when I told you my plan. Perhaps I shouldn't have started this stunt."

"Don't worry about that. It was the only thing to do. The thing to bother about now is how to get this dam built. I guess we'll have to let the men into the scheme."

"I think so too. Somehow, I don't think any of them will squeal. They won't have anything to do with me, but I can't say I blame them much. But — but they are a good bunch and — and I'm going to *make* them like me before I get through!"

"That's the stuff!" Jerry encouraged him. "Stick to that and you'll have 'em eating out of your hand. But about the dam — I'll tell Pierre about it to-night and we'll start everyone

we can spare from the actual cutting on Monday. We'll have to — it's our only chance!"

When Pierre was shown the place and told what was the plan in mind, he agreed at once that it was the only thing to do, but it was evident that he hated to take even one man from his regular job.

"Me, I think I smell the spring coming," he said, sniffing the air. "Only a little time more for to get those logs out."

"But even if we get them out, where will we be if we can't get them to the railroad?" Jerry demanded. "I've told you this more than once!"

"All right, all right, I know, Boss Jerry, but me, I hate so much to take the men from the cutting."

"It's got to be done all the same," was Jerry's parting remark.

The next day was Sunday and Jerry slept late after a long evening spent over the accounts. After he had dressed he went over to the cook shanty only to find it deserted. This was surprising, for usually the men sprawled the long day away, talking or playing games.

Where could they be? He slipped into the bunkhouse, only to find it as empty as the mess room. Had they all quit overnight? This terrible thought flashed from his mind as quickly as it had slipped in, for he could not believe that Pierre and Nils would be able to do such a thing no matter what the provocation.

But Old Penny ought to be around anyhow. Even so, there was no answer to his shouts. Happening by the great cook stove, he saw food — for one person — carefully placed so that it would keep warm. Evidently it was for him. So he ate before making any further attempt to find out what had caused a whole camp of men to vanish so completely.

As he drank his coffee, a possible explanation occurred to him. So anxious was he to find out if it was true, that he left half of it, bolted out into the frosty air and started off in the direction of the proposed location of his new dam.

As he got nearer to the spot, he knew that his idea was correct, for the sound of many axes rang through the clear air.

They were building his dam on their day of rest! They were using their own time so that

the regular work of the week would not be interrupted!

A thrill of happiness shot through the boy. He knew now that for a certainty he had won the absolute loyalty of his men. That they had become a close-knit, loyal band that would go through anything and work to the limit to make his job a success.

When he came on the scene of operations, he was amazed at the progress that had already been made. Everyone was there; even old Penny was swinging an axe and screeching useless directions at everybody else. The sledge drivers and cant hook men were pulling the logs into place and chopping away the snow and frozen earth so that the pointed ends of the timber could be driven into the hard ground.

It was as if the men were at play. Shouts of laughter echoed and snatches of song were heard. But, when he stepped out into the clearing all noise ceased and the work stopped short. The men stood still, a little embarrassed, like great schoolboys, caught doing a kind deed.

He saw that something was expected of him, that he must make some sign. It was horribly

embarrassing because he could think of nothing that would tell the men the great gratitude he felt for what they had done.

At last he threw up his arms and shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Thank you!"

Then, to cover his confusion, he grabbed an axe and started to chop wildly at a log that would never be of any use to the dam.

CHAPTER XVI

THOMAS PAYS A CALL

A little later when the work was again booming along, Jerry King found an opportunity to speak to his foreman and learn from that excited person how the thing had come about.

"Last night I tell my old partner, Nils, what's going for to happen on Monday and it is that big Swede that is responsible. He it is who tell the men and speak that they work to-day. But, by golly," the foreman's voice was full of pride, "those lumberjacks only need for to know. After that they are like great boys; they laugh and yell, and get out long before the light is enough bright for the work. A brave bunch of pigs, those jacks!"

"You bet!" was the fervent reply. "But I don't think they ought to work on their day to rest."

"I know; but me, I think maybeso they rest

a lot when they do this. It is for them a great game — a fine sport. And too, maybeso the good God will think that they have done right to do a good deed on this day. There is no church in the woods for the lumberjack and in the shanties he must play cards all day or fight. Me, I think it better he is outside where he laugh and get kindness in his heart. What do you think?"

Jerry was willing to be convinced, but he made up his mind that never again if he could help it would he let the men work on Sunday. This time the need was so great that it seemed to be justified.

Under so many willing hands the dam grew as if by magic and when darkness came it was almost finished. Anything else that had to be done to it could be accomplished at odd moments.

In the thick of the work, doing his share with all the strength that was in him, Ran Blair had won a grudging approval from the men. One or two of them had spoken to him almost on even terms, so at nightfall he, too, felt that he had made progress.

The regular logging went on almost without friction, for the weather stayed cold and clear. The fact that the men were enthusiastic and eager seemed to prevent accidents and beyond the usual number of broken trace bars and split chains, nothing serious happened.

But the week passed without sign of O'Day. Jerry was beginning to worry in earnest about his friend when a letter came saying that the delay was unavoidable, but to expect him any minute. The letter was postmarked Chicago.

Probably Link knew what he was about, but Jerry thought it was queer that the man would take just this time to go to trace up his family. The situation at the camp was so serious that it seemed to the boy that O'Day should have wanted to come back unless he was actually sick and couldn't move.

But the job at hand gave him little opportunity to think of these things. He was too busy and he had too much faith in Link to let anything interfere with the work that had to be done.

The spring that Pierre had smelt in the air now seemed to be coming fast. Even Jerry

could feel it. Ran's tablets showed that they still lacked about two hundred thousand feet to make up the minimum, and things looked bad.

Pierre drove the men, and Jerry drove Pierre.

"Just a few weeks more!" prayed Jerry. "Just a few weeks and we'll be all right!"

But it did not look as if those weeks would be granted them. One morning, after the sun had been high for two hours, the snow on the tree branches began to drip and by afternoon the men were soaked. Then it got cold again and the clothes froze, making the men's movements difficult.

"Ol' spring, she will come fast," commented Pierre. "She's got started now!"

This happening caused the logs to roll into the valley even faster. The scaling tablets showed the minimum approaching closer and closer. It was a big race — a man's race — as Pierre had said that night in the bunkhouse.

One day Ran Blair remarked suddenly to Jerry:

"I was to report to Thomas just as soon as it began to thaw. I wonder what he will do when I don't show up?"

"Perhaps he knows already what we've been up to," suggested Jerry. "Talk travels quick through the woods."

"I don't think this has. Pierre has kept every mother's son of a lumberjack in camp since Boss O'Day went away. What I believe is that Thomas still thinks things are in a bad way up here. He knows that the boss is away and therefore everything is more than sure to be in a muss and that we can't possibly succeed. But I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him come up here at any minute to gloat over his revenge."

"You think he might do that?" Jerry asked. "Wait a minute, let me think. . . . I've got it! Listen. If we can keep him away from here for another week, so that he won't know what we are up to, it will spike any other plan he might have. Isn't that so?"

"Sure!"

"Do you think you could go down and report to him that the stuff we have on the skidways falls far short of what we ought to have? You needn't say anything about the stuff up in the valley — we'll hold that as the last card to play."

"You bet I can! I'll start this afternoon. But, Jerry, I hope this will be the last time I ever have to — to lie about anything."

Jerry's plan had been formed so quickly that he had not realized that it really meant lying to Thomas.

"I hope so too," he said quickly, "so much that I'm not going to let you do it this time even! I didn't think, that's all. We'll have to take the chance of Thomas finding out whatever he can. You mustn't go!"

"But, Jerry, it won't be any harm in fooling Thomas. He deserves it! And we mustn't lose no matter what we have to do to win!"

"I'm not so sure of that. But, anyway, I can't let you lie to help us out. Don't let's worry. We can win without that. If we can't — we won't deserve to."

So Ran did not go.

A day or two later, however, his hunch that Thomas might show up on the job proved correct.

Just before it was time for the men to come back from the woods a sleigh drove up and the burly form that Jerry had not seen since that

long-ago day in Pentico got out and entered the office. Jerry happened to be in.

It was all he could do to appear natural when the man greeted him in the same sort of boisterous good humor that before had made the boy suspicious. But he knew that he would gain nothing by being openly hostile, so, as heartily as he could, he welcomed his visitor.

"Just thought I'd run up. Wanted to see how you and my friend O'Day were getting along," he rumbled in explanation of his coming. "You've had a good winter? But where's O'Day? Will he be in soon?"

Jerry knew that Thomas was bluffing about O'Day. "He knows as well as I do that Link is away," he said to himself, but aloud he merely remarked:

"Oh, didn't you know he had gone outside?"

"No? Did he really? Must have been an important errand to take him out just at this time. I suppose he found the cutting of this nice little piece of mine so easy that he didn't have to worry. As I told you before, I like O'Day — that's the reason I made him such a good contract. When I like a man I like him.

Besides, I wanted to show him that I had forgotten that little muss-up we had — but perhaps he didn't tell you about that?"

Jerry hoped that Thomas's love of hearing his own voice would keep him going until the men were safely in from the job. Then it would be too late for Thomas to go on a trip of inspection. If he could only keep Thomas from seeing the store of logs that were lying ready for the freshet, everything would be in much better shape. So he answered that Link O'Day had merely mentioned that misunderstanding, "but I think he's forgotten all about it by now."

"Just like your partner. Just like him! Good fellow, that's what I always say. O'Day's a good fellow." He beamed but his eyes were small and calculating. "Then you have been boss since he went away? Fine for a young fellow to be boss, fine! I suppose the men have worked all right?"

"I can't complain," returned the boy shortly; "they are doing as well for me as they did for O'Day before he left."

It seemed to Jerry that Thomas heaved a sigh of relief, probably because he knew that when

O'Day had left the men were in a bad state and Jerry's words seemed to mean that things were hardly any better.

"That's fine! I'm glad. But by the way, I just happened to think of it. Didn't you give a fellow by the name of Blair a job up here?"

Jerry nodded.

"Well, to be friendly, I ought to warn you about him — I had to fire him. Disliked to do it, but it was necessary. You look out for him: he's a bad egg. Just thought I'd tell you, that's all. Don't thank me, it's only neighborly," and the man laughed unpleasantly. "But I've got to go. I'm due up at Thirty-two to-night. Before I go I wonder if you would tell me how many feet you've got on the skids. That will help me in making arrangements at the mill."

Jerry was glad that the question had been put in just that way, for he could answer it quite truthfully and still leave Thomas thinking that he had won his dirty game.

"Something over three million," he said. "I'll get the exact figures."

"No — no! Never mind, that's all I need

to know," returned the man. "Quite all I need to know!"

As he spoke the smile on his face changed to a sneer and he got up from his chair and almost bellowed at the boy. Gone was the attempt at friendliness and in its place was a sort of triumphant rage.

"You know what it means, you little whipper-snapper? It means that I've beaten that stuck-up partner of yours. It means that I've broken him! He'll leave the woods without a cent and I've done it, d'ye hear, I've done it! I waited a long time to get even but things do come to them that waits. Why — why don't you say somethin'? Can't you hear what I'm sayin' to you?"

The bottled up meanness of the man had come forth at last in a great flood of gloating. When Jerry had told him there was only a little over three million on the skids he could hold in his triumph no longer.

Jerry stood up straight before the infuriated man and spoke calmly but with scorn in his tone.

"I hear you, all right. You must be proud of yourself ——"

"Of course I'm proud of myself," cried Thomas, throwing caution to the winds. "Didn't I slip that little joker in the contract? Didn't I mess things up when the men got going too fast——"

He stopped short, realizing that he had let slip something that should never be acknowledged.

"So you confess to that, you beast!" flamed Jerry. "I knew you were back of it but I never thought you would boast of it! I——"

But whatever the boy was about to say never was heard, for Thomas had reached forward and caught him in his great grip, pulling him off his feet. Jerry read in the man's eyes that he was in for a terrible mauling, but before the first blow fell upon him, he heard the door creak open on its hinges.

Thomas's fingers slipped from their hold and from a sitting position Jerry saw who had entered.

It was Link O'Day. And the look on his face was terrible to see.

For a moment the two men eyed each other, then O'Day advanced slowly, as light on his

feet as a cat. Not a word came through his clenched teeth. The big lumberman quailed before what he saw was coming.

"Crash!" O'Day's fist had found its mark and behind it was all the strength that was in his wiry body. Thomas was a coward; this first blow was his finish. Ducking, scrambling, he tried to get out of the way of the torrent of blows that fell upon him.

"You swine!" cried O'Day. "Fight or I'll kill you!"

Thomas finally crouched in a heap and would not get up and even O'Day's fury was not sufficient to allow him to hit a man when he was down.

Jerry had watched with flaming eyes.

"Let him go, Link," he begged. "He's had enough!"

"Get up and get out of here," ordered O'Day. "Quick!"

Silently the big man struggled to his feet and collected his things. Then he shambled to the door.

"You're already paid out for this," he managed to say through his bruised lips. "I've

broken you. Ask the boy — you haven't cut your minimum and I'm going to hold you to your contract — and the timber belongs to me!"

This was more than Jerry could stand. He did not stop to consider whether or not he would put Thomas on his guard but blurted out, "We're not licked yet! Don't be so sure until the end. Maybe we'll show you something before we're through!"

"Get out!" was all that Link had to say.

And Thomas got out.

CHAPTER XVII

RAN BLAIR ON GUARD

"Gee, Link, but I'm glad to see you! And you sure came at just the right moment. Something was about to break and I think it was going to be me!"

Jerry's attempt at a joke was a little feeble, for the tenseness of the happenings which had just gone before was still on him. He had spoken as the door slammed behind Thomas.

"I ought to have been here before and this couldn't have happened at all," replied O'Day. "But you seemed to be getting on so well——"

"How did you know?" the boy demanded, surprised.

"I'll explain. You see, when I left I did not want you to feel there were any strings on your being the boss, so I didn't tell you where to reach me. But, in case of an emergency I left the address with Pierre Lavin so he could tell

it to you if he thought it was necessary. After that bully thing you did at the bunkhouse he wanted me to know about it, so he got young Blair to write for him. Pierre can use an axe but a pen is something he doesn't know much about. After that Blair got into the habit of writing on his own hook."

"He never said anything to me about it."

"No, but his letters told me the things you would never have said. How the men worked for you and the idea about the dam——"

"But, Link, that was Blair's idea, not mine! Did he wish it onto me?"

"He sure let me think so," Link laughed. "Anyhow that's a score in his favor."

"But why did you stay away so long? You got the money all right."

"I was getting to that when you broke in. I knew from his letters that the men were working their heads off for you and it didn't seem like good business for me to come back and mess things up. I didn't make much of a success with 'em before I went away. I sort of doped it out that the longer I stayed away the better chance we had of winning out."

"Quit kidding me, Link," said the boy. "The men will work just as hard for you."

"Perhaps, but I didn't want to take the chance. What I did was to shoot up to Chicago where I believed I could do two things. One was to learn what had been found out about your parents and the other was to try to corral a little extra money so that I could hire an extra gang and throw 'em in here at the last minute if they were needed to get out our minimum."

It showed how deeply the job had gripped Jerry when he asked first whether the money had been found.

"Sure, and a husky bunch of lumberjacks have just come in with me. But haven't you any curiosity about the other thing?"

"Of course, but it can wait until this job is over. We've just got to win out. It's the most important thing in the world."

"I'm glad you feel that way, for there's another disappointment coming to you. My people in Chicago have not been able as yet to get a real line on anything. Every clue they have found has led to nothing. But they are

still on the job and I think we'll win out there too."

Since the situation in Chicago was unchanged, Jerry saw no reason to bother about it further. He went back to the subject of the job.

"That's great news about the new men, Link. I think we're going to need them and need them badly! Practically all the logs of our first cut are at the railroad. As soon as the teams can be taken from hauling we can make a great drive up where we're cutting now."

"We will start the new gang in the morning," said O'Day, "but what I want to talk to you about is this new stunt of the river. Do you honestly think it's going to work?"

"It's *got* to! And anyway, Link, I think I can show you that it was our only chance."

"I believe that without being shown. It was a good hunch, whether it works or not."

They talked over the details of the work until it was time to turn in. The next day Jerry showed Link all that had been accomplished.

When O'Day appeared, Pierre Lavin started to grab an axe and go back to his old job, but Link stopped him.

"What's the idea, Pierre?"

"You are back. No need for two foremen. I go back to ——"

"The only place you go back to is being boss," said O'Day with a smile. "Perhaps if I had made you foreman at first we would not have had any trouble at all."

"But what is it you will do?" asked the puzzled Frenchman.

"Boss you, I guess."

Under the new arrangement, Blair became a swamper and Jerry went back to scaling. O'Day had the good sense not to interfere with Pierre in any way and the work went on without a hitch. The new men were good workers and under their combined efforts the logs came out so fast that Jerry was put to it to keep his scaling up to date.

The camp was in good spirits. Everyone felt that success was in their grasp, that they were about to win the race against nature — and Thomas.

For a part of each day it thawed, but not enough to prove a real handicap.

Nothing had been heard from Thomas. It

seemed as if he really believed that the cut was so far below the minimum that there was no chance of O'Day's catching up, even with the new men he had imported.

Ran Blair, however, was doubtful of this and suggested that someone ought to go up and guard the diversion dam they had built on the outside property. If that was destroyed everything was lost, and a stick of dynamite would easily do the job. This seemed to be only common prudence, so each night Nils, Pierre, Blair and Jerry took turns at the job. But nothing happened and everything went smoothly, almost too smoothly.

At last came what they had feared for so long a time — the soft warm rain which would melt snow and ice so much faster than the hottest sun.

The night before it started, great heavy clouds banked up in the sky and Penny shook his head sadly.

"She's a-comin', lads. You listen to ol' Penny: spring is a-comin' fast!"

And so it proved. At first there were flakes of snow mixed with the drops, but soon they

ceased and a steady, dreary drizzle clothed the woods in a gray cloud.

"How do we stand, Jerry?" asked O'Day anxiously, coming on the boy as he figured the total number of feet cut.

"About six more days will put us safe," was the answer. "Do you think we'll have them?"

"I don't know. It's just a chance," the man replied, starting for the door. "Pierre will have to hustle those poor devils even more!"

The work done the next few days was almost beyond belief. The men seemed to take it as an insult that the rain had come so soon, and they showed their anger by laboring like fiends. Out in the woods Penny heated coffee over a fire he coaxed to burn in spite of the rain and carried it around to the weary men. Everyone did his part and more. Jerry was proud of his gang and O'Day was proud of him.

Pierre was too busy to be proud of anything or anybody. He seemed to be everywhere, urging, driving and lending a hand when a hand was needed.

The rain kept falling steadily, drenching the men to their skins. Here and there patches

of dark earth showed through the snow and the ice over the little brooks was getting rotten and beginning to break.

Snatching a moment from his scaling, Jerry went down to the big dam they had built and found that the water was already collecting.

For two days more they worked at this mad pace. The following morning Jerry raised a shout as he straightened up from scaling a log.

"We've done it, men, we've done it!"

A great cry of jubilation went up from the men. They had worked like mad but the work had not been in vain. The log that Jerry had last branded marked the finish of the race. Against time and all sorts of odds the four million feet had been cut!

But the moment's triumph was cut short by Pierre.

"Hurry up! Back to your work, my lads. Maybeso we lose some logs before they arrive at the mill, therefore we must have more for to take their place. Hurry!"

Tired and weary as they were, the men made no complaint and soon the scene was again all activity.

That night, when they trooped back to camp, they found a great dinner awaiting them. Link O'Day had told old Penny that he could have anything he wanted from the van and the cook had taken him at his word and had piled the long table with the dishes he had made. Afterwards there was free tobacco and a new pipe for everyone. The only one to miss it was Blair, whose turn it was to guard the diversion dam.

Link and Jerry had come to the mess shanty and O'Day had made a little speech of thanks and announced the extra sum of money that would be added to each man's wages when the logs had reached the mill.

It was a scene of high good humor and just as everybody was feeling particularly happy, the door flew open and Ran Blair staggered in.

He was a terrible sight. Blood was streaming from a cut in his face.

"They — they have broken our — our dam!" he managed to say. "I got — got away ——" and with this he slumped to the floor.

"Come on, men," cried O'Day. "That will have to be fixed right now. Who'll come?"

There was an answering roar from the whole crowd. Jerry had picked Blair up and carried him into the bunkhouse. With Penny's help he got the clothes off the unconscious boy and then attended to the cut as well as he could. He was relieved to find that it was only a slight wound.

A few moments later, Blair came to.

"Gee, I must have passed out," were his first words.

"I should think you did," said Jerry. "You had a right to after what must have happened to you. Don't tell me now; you ought not to talk!"

"I'm — I'm all right," said the other weakly. "Did — have they gone to fix things up?"

"Sure, the whole bunch of them ——"

"And you didn't go?"

"Can't you see I'm right here?"

"You stayed to look after *me?*"

"Well, somebody had to fix you up," defended Jerry. He had wanted to go, to take his part in the repairing of the damage, but he wasn't going to let Blair know it.

"You're a good chap, Jerry, and you've done a lot for me."

"Rats," Jerry jeered. "I haven't done anything."

"But I must tell you what happened."

"It can wait."

"No, I want to tell it now. I was trying to keep out of the wind behind a big old fir tree right close to the dam, when I saw a couple of shadows come out of the woods on the other side of the gully. At first I thought it might be somebody from the camp, but it was not long before I knew they were up to some mischief."

"Dynamite?" asked Jerry.

"No, they only had peavies and crowbars. You know we built the dam at night and it's no better made than it ought to be. Besides, they figured they had all night to do their job — they didn't know anybody was on guard."

"Didn't you shoot over their heads? You had the rifle along, didn't you?"

"The trigger jammed on me and it was no use. I had to try something else ——"

"What?"

"Oh, I thought I might be able to scare 'em off, so I sneaked out on the dam and jumped down on them. But it was no good; they caught

me and tied me up. The worst of it was I had to watch them tear down our work without being able to do anything."

"But how did you get away?"

"They hadn't tied me very tight. I hope the gang will be able to fix things up. The water was flying pretty lively when I went on watch!"

There was nothing to do except wait and hope for the best. One thing at least had come out of the night's experience and that was the fact that Ran Blair had proved his grit. Jerry sat by the boy he had befriended as he dozed away the hours before the men came back, and thought of the great change that had taken place. From a shifty, cowardly sneak, Blair had become a man!

Over half the night had passed when the gang trooped in, utterly weary but happy.

"Did you fix it?" asked Jerry of the first comer.

"Sure we did. What did you think we went out for?"

Blair heard the answer, heaved a great sigh of relief, and muttered:

"*Now,* I can go to sleep."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DRIVE

When he was sure that Ran Blair had dropped off into a real, health-giving sleep, Jerry turned to find that O'Day was waiting for him.

"He's all right? Not badly hurt?" was the whispered question.

"I think he will be out on the job in the morning," replied the boy as he walked to the door with his friend.

"Good! He certainly did a good job for us to-night. Now, you can turn in——"

"Not yet!" Jerry exclaimed. "I've got to talk to you before hitting the hay. Let's go to the office. But just a jiffy—— Someone is watching the dam?"

"You bet! Both the diversion and the big one."

"I knew you'd think of it but I wanted to be sure."

When they reached the office, O'Day asked what was on the boy's mind.

"We've got to get those logs moving quick. Thomas knows now what we're up to and he won't rest until he finds some way of bothering us. I only wish there would be enough water to-morrow to float our logs!"

"I'm afraid that won't happen," returned O'Day. "It might have if the dam hadn't been monkeyed with to-night. Somehow, I think it will be a couple of days before we get going."

"And Thomas will be up to something before then."

"Easy there, Jerry. Perhaps it's not as bad as you think. Doesn't it seem possible that the men who caught Blair last night will report that they did their work and that it will satisfy Thomas?"

"Maybe, but he knows we will rebuild it, even if he can't figure that we have done it so quickly. He's up to something else, I bet."

"Well, we'll have to take our chance," said the man slowly. "I don't think we can do much good worrying about it. Get off to bed; perhaps things will be better to-morrow."

But in the morning the situation was unchanged. There seemed to be but little more water flowing around the logs.

Pierre put the men back to cutting but they worked listlessly, with one eye on the stage of the stream.

The one patch of brightness that made the day at all bearable was the way in which the men greeted Blair when he came out on the job. His head was bandaged and he looked white but insisted on tackling his work.

Overnight the boy had become reinstated in the camp's respect. Now he was one of them and they called cheery greetings to him and included him in their jokes. There seemed to be no reserve in their manner; what Blair had done the night before had convinced them of his complete reformation.

Jerry had gone to the van at lunch time and had settled to his accounts when Blair ran in.

"Come on — quick!" he cried. "The water's rising! Mr. O'Day sent me to tell you."

In a jiffy the two boys were making their way back to the work.

"Just after you left," Ran panted, "a wave

seemed to come down the valley. Already some of the logs are moving — what do you suppose made it happen?"

"The only thing I can think of is that the ice went out on a pretty big stream up country and the water has just got here. That might account for the suddenness of it — Hooray!" Jerry broke off as he came in sight of the stream. "They are floating, Ran, they are, for a fact!"

It was true. Some of the logs at the edge of the tangle were dipping and rolling uncertainly. Then one would free itself from the jam and slowly, hesitatingly, start towards the dam a mile below.

The boys broke into a run and a moment later stood beside O'Day, who was watching with fascinated eyes the boys' plan work out.

"It's happened!" exulted Jerry. "Twenty-four hours and there won't be a stick here — they'll all be down at our dam. Then we'll have won!"

O'Day smiled. "Looks that way all right, but I'd not be too sure. Something might happen ——"

And just then something did!

Over the hill from the direction of the diversion dam came a running figure. It was one of the men who had been left there on guard. When he got within shouting distance he yelled at the top of his lungs. Jerry did not catch the words but it was clear that Pierre Lavin had, for he in his turn raised a great cry.

"To the dam, my braves. Quick! quick! and bring your axes, your hooks! Come on!"

Jerry, O'Day and Blair had already started, so they did not see the forest empty itself of the men. They came yelling and laughing. They knew from what Pierre had said that a fight was in the wind and it made them happy.

The trio was first at the dam. They found Hank Tenny, a driver, holding down the situation. He had the rifle that had gone back on Blair the night before and with it was holding at bay a mass of men who were strangers.

"Not a step further, my jolly bunch o' pirates," he was saying, "or I'll give ye a taste o' what's in this little cannon. When the boss comes, ye can talk. I'm in no humor for it meself!"

If the situation had not been so serious, it would have been funny how easily the big Irishman held the mob at bay.

"We've got to hold the dam another day at any cost!" panted Jerry. "I——"

"Wait here till our bunch comes up," Blair suggested. They had stopped for consultation behind some brush, from which point of vantage they could see and hear but not be seen.

"No!" O'Day said firmly. "I'm going out to talk to them. This is my funeral and I don't want you or any of my bunch to get hurt——"

"You'll have a fine chance keeping the gang out of this," cried Jerry. "Listen to them coming!" And with this he slipped away from his companions.

The next moment the battle of the dam was in full swing. Led by their little foreman, Camp Twenty-nine proceeded to wade into the mob of strangers who had come to capture their dam, let the water loose, and thereby cheat Boss Jerry out of the success for which he had worked so hard. That it would also mean that their bonus would be lost too, was an added incentive to brave deeds.

Thomas had sent up more than enough men to match those in O'Day's camp and after the first surprise they began to hold their own and have perhaps just a little the better of the scrap.

Blair and O'Day had been swept into the melee and had no time to notice that Jerry was gone.

It was a glorious fight, a fight that is told over and over again in the bunkhouses up there of a winter's evening. Cant hooks whistled through the air like battle-axes and fists flew as thick as hailstones.

Pierre encouraged his men with all the power of his lungs, but he felt that they were being pushed back; that step by step they were losing ground. He would not admit defeat and only fought the harder; but his men were not so brave. When they felt the tide of battle turn against them, the steam behind their blows evaporated and they were ready to cry quits.

Thomas's men were already raising shouts of victory when something happened to cut them short. Someone was attacking them from the rear!

It was Jerry. He had stopped a handful of

the men as they came over the hill and had led them around behind the enemy. Caught between two fires and not knowing how great was the relieving force, they hesitated for a moment and in that moment they were lost, for Pierre's men, heartened by the reinforcements, fought with renewed fury.

Soon the mob broke and ran. The fight was over and for the moment the dam was safe.

It was surprising how few serious injuries had been sustained in spite of the ferocity of the fight. Jerry put it down to the heavy clothes the men wore and the high physical development of all of them. There were many eyes that would be black in the morning and noses that would be very sore, but from present reports, everybody would be on the job.

The men were enthusiastic about their success and promised to deal the same with anyone else that tried that sort of game on them again. Link O'Day said very little but it was easy to see the pride he felt in his men.

"That was better than talking, wasn't it?" laughed Jerry as he came up to his friend. "We sure did 'em up brown!"

"Yes," O'Day agreed, "it worked this time. But I guess we're in for some talking anyhow. Look who's coming."

Jerry turned and saw a very angry man approaching. It was Thomas.

"I notice he kept safely hid behind a tree while any scrapping was going on," said Jerry disgustedly.

Thomas made no attempt to disguise his feelings as he stamped up to the group. His face was distorted with fury and he had difficulty in getting his words out.

"You — you!" he spluttered. "This — this is my land, d'ye hear? My land! This dam, I — I want it off ——"

"Yes?" said O'Day calmly. "When?"

"Now! At — at once, d'ye hear?"

"Is that why you sent up that gang of roughnecks?"

"I'll — I'll have the law on you!" shouted Thomas, paying no attention to the question that had gone before.

"Look here, Thomas," Link O'Day said; "you know as well as I do that there's mighty little law up here in the woods. If you think

that you can bluff us out of here you are a mile off the track. The next man that monkeys with the dam will get shot, remember that. If there was anything in that law what was the use of your *army?*"

As there did not seem to be any answer to this last shot, O'Day turned and gave the orders that would distribute his men, some to guard the dam, behind which the water was rising steadily, and the others to go back and roll the logs into the stream.

For a moment or two longer Thomas stood his ground and then with muttered threats, strode away in the direction from which he had come. Just at the edge of the clearing he turned and shook his fist at the dam. Then he disappeared.

"That's the end of Thomas," laughed Blair, coming up to Jerry. "He knows when he's licked."

"I'm not so sure about that," was the answer. "I've got a full-sized hunch that he's not finished yet. I'd like to know what he's doping out right now."

"Don't lose any sleep over it," Blair advised optimistically. "The thing to worry about now

is getting the logs into the stream. Come on, let's see what's doing. Boss O'Day has left enough men here to take care of a surprise attack."

Back in the valley the boys found that everybody had turned cant hook men and were rolling the logs into the stream, or into such positions that the water would lift them when it rose. Already there was a marked shrinkage in the jumble of timber.

"Every one of these logs will be gone this time to-morrow," shouted Pierre when they came near him. "We're going to beat Thomas sure, just like we beat his men. Hoopla, work, you lumberjacks, work!"

When dusk fell, a great fire was started on the bank and supper was eaten around it. The men would not quit even if Pierre had allowed it.

"It is the *drive*," he explained to O'Day. "The men, they do not expect to sleep on the drive. Sure thing. The water maybeso he stops quick, so nobody has got time for to sleep."

So all night long the logs were dropped into the ever-rising stream and started on their jour-

ney, which would end only when the great gang saws would transform them into planks. Songs helped the men's tired muscles to respond to the extra demand made upon them. A great can of coffee always boiled on the fire and it was so much in demand that old Penny was almost cheerful.

When the dawn broke at last there were few logs left to be entrusted to the stream, which by now was a roaring flood. Noon saw the last of them bobbing and ducking along to the spread of water backed up by the dam.

"Thomas can have his old dam now!" cried Jerry. "We've had all we wanted of it."

"Not quite," answered Blair. "We'll want all the water we can get until the logs are past our dam."

"Right you are, old boy; I hadn't thought of that."

The boys were standing looking over the great pond which their dam had made. The countless logs floated so close together that hardly any water was visible. Just then they heard a shout. It was Link O'Day calling Jerry. They made their way to him as quickly as possible.

"Well, Jerry, you got the logs all right, but what are you going to do with 'em now?"

"Why — why, send them along to the railroad, of course," answered the boy, confused.

"How? You've built a good dam but I can't see that you put in any sluice gate. Are we going to stop here forever?"

In a flash Jerry saw what had happened and the knowledge that he had made a mistake was terrible.

"I — I never thought of that," he stammered. "Somehow, I just thought of the dam ——" He stopped, for he had been thinking hard as he talked. "Just a minute, Link, just a minute. I know a way out."

He did not see the twinkle in O'Day's eyes, so he went on as earnestly as he had started.

"We'll blow it up. Dam, logs, and everything. There's powder enough in the van ——"

"I knew you'd think of it," laughed the man, "but I wanted to scare you. I sent for the powder and it's here now. Pierre is below the dam setting the charges this minute —— Here, where are you going?" for he was speaking to Jerry's back.

No answer came from Jerry, so they followed as quickly as they could. When they reached the edge of the dam they saw the boy had almost caught up with Pierre. When he did, they witnessed a rapid argument which Jerry won.

A moment later O'Day realized what Jerry was up to and he shouted a command for him to stop, to go back. Either the boy did not or would not hear, for he stooped and lighted the fuse that Pierre had just set. Then, running swiftly, he came to the next, touched it and was off like the wind. Five times he stopped, leaving behind him hissing snakes of fire. Then with a bound he was up the bank and pulling O'Day and Blair back to the trees and safety.

Pierre had cut his fuses skillfully, for hardly were they screened by the tree trunks when one mighty explosion tore the air into shreds. All five charges had gone off at the same instant.

CHAPTER XIX

A GAME LOSER

For a moment it was impossible to tell what had been accomplished. The smoke was dense over the place where the dam had been and the noise of the explosion had been so great that other sounds did not exist for a moment. Then, too, fragments of splintered wood began to crash down through the trees. These bits of the dam had been thrown high in the air and were now coming down like gigantic hailstones.

Luckily no one happened to be in the way of these missiles and the gang soon assembled intact on the bank to watch the logs fly by on the flood water.

O'Day's reproof of Jerry for having taken on the dangerous job of touching off the powder was forgotten in the excitement of success. Everyone was talking and no one was listening

to his neighbor. The general belief was that success had finally been won, and they were in a mood to talk about it.

Pierre and a few of the men who had had experience in river drives, went out on the floating logs, leaping from one to another with the agility of cats. It was their job to see that no jams occurred and that all the logs were kept moving. This was the first time Jerry had ever seen logs ridden and it was fascinating. Every moment Pierre seemed about to lose his balance and then he would save himself by jumping to another log, give a quick push with his cant hook to some slow sister of a timber and be off, skipping over the tangle of floating logs with the certainty and grace of a dancing master.

Other men started to scour the banks, rolling the stranded logs into the fast water.

"Come on, let's go down to the railroad," suggested Ran Blair. "The first of 'em ought to be there by now."

They were. The wall of water that had leaped from behind the blown-up dam had carried its great burden with it and now it was

rushing under the boom chain that held the logs in place.

While the cutting was still going on, the blacksmith had manufactured this boom. It was a long string of logs, held together by the links of a strong chain. Each end of this had been securely anchored far on either side of the river bed. Now it proved its worth, for it held the logs in place but let the water flow on.

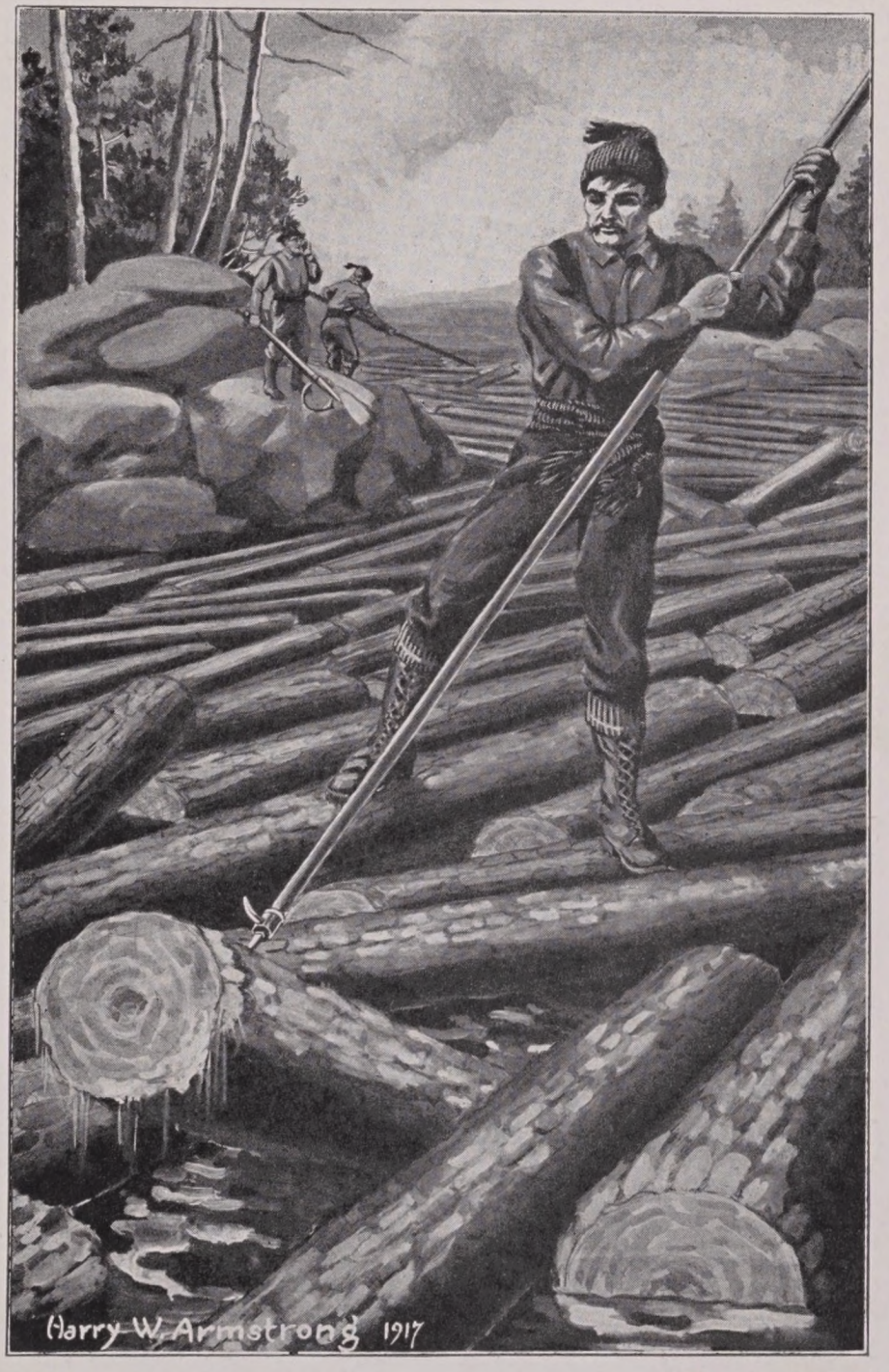
As they watched they could hear it creak and groan under the pressure it had to bear.

Soon the first rush was over and the logs were coming to join their comrades in ones and twos. Occasionally more would float in a bunch around the corner. To O'Day and Jerry each log meant the completion of the job, that success had been won in spite of everything.

"I guess there's no argument now about your having done the trick," said Blair, with a grin. "There's one thing I'd like to see——"

"What?" asked Jerry. "I'll bite."

"Thomas' face. I'll bet he's sore. He's taken enough trouble trying to beat you out of what is yours, Boss O'Day, to make a fortune honestly."



Every moment Pierre seemed about to lose his balance and then he would save himself by jumping to another log.

"I'm sorry for him," was O'Day's answer. "It's bad stuff to pack a grudge. I never found it got you anywheres."

"It doesn't," Blair became serious suddenly. "I've learned that and it's Jerry here who's taught me——"

"Shut up," Jerry tried to head the other boy off.

"I won't! Boss O'Day, I'll bet he never told you just what sort of a rotten puppy I was until he took me in hand. Did he?"

"I don't remember——"

"Of course you don't. He never opened his mouth. But I'm going to tell you now."

To Jerry King's great embarrassment, Blair related the whole story, going back even to the fight when they were all with the Forestry Service.

When he had finished, O'Day looked at Jerry.

"Good boy," he said quietly. Before anything more could be said, Jerry started the discussion off towards a different and less personal subject.

By the next day the whole cut had been floated down and lay snug behind the boom. The next

operation was to load the logs on the cars and ship them to the mill.

"A good part of this shipping will be your work," said O'Day to Jerry, "so you might just as well come down to Pentico with me and see about getting the truck cars shunted in here."

They caught the shoo-fly and changed to the local that finally dropped them in the town where Thomas had his mill.

"As soon as I see if there's anything for me at the postoffice we'll drill right up to Thomas's office," O'Day remarked as they left the station.

"Thomas's office?" Jerry echoed, puzzled. "But, Link, what business have we got to do with Thomas until we put the timber down in his yard?"

"We've got to see about the cars to load it on. It's his railroad."

The boy could hardly believe his ears. Somehow he had never for a moment thought of who owned the logging road.

"Have you — have you ——" he stuttered in his excitement — "did you make some deal with Thomas to carry out our logs?"

Link O'Day suddenly saw what Jerry was driving at.

"Sure. He said I could use the railroad——"

"Did you have it in writing?"

"I don't — don't remember," confessed the man. "I don't think so. Thomas seemed so decent and, as the railroad was the only way to get the stuff out, I didn't think there was any question about it. No, there wasn't anything in writing about it. Great guns, what a locoed mule I was!"

"It looks rotten for us," admitted Jerry.

"I'll never forgive myself if this busts up everything at the last minute, and makes all our work go for nothing. It will be my fault alone."

"We're not licked yet. Maybe Thomas won't think of this stunt. Don't let's borrow trouble, Link."

These were brave words but in reality Jerry was far from believing them himself. His object was to hearten the man who had been so good to him and had given him a real chance to make good. Down in his heart the boy was certain that the only reason Thomas had let

them go on with their drive was that he had retained this last trump card and meant to play it.

"I've got to know what's up quick!" O'Day cried. "We'll let the mail wait until we find out. Come along," and he stepped out hurriedly down the street towards the mill.

Jerry followed and a few moments later they were in the office where the boy had first seen the man who had taken so much trouble to ruin them. The same old bookkeeper was driving his pen across the great ledger — except that the stove was not so red, nothing was changed.

Thomas came in a moment later. The boy had expected him to be surly and resentful of the treatment that had been given him at the dam. The fact that he had been beaten in that encounter could not have helped but make him furious.

But Jerry could discover no signs of this expected attitude when the lumberman saw who was waiting for him. He advanced, smiling, to greet O'Day. The boy was amazed and puzzled at the same time. It was not natural

— there must be something underneath this, was what he thought.

"Well, well," boomed Thomas. "Come down to see me, have you, O'Day? Forgot our little squabble? That's right. So have I. You beat me fair and square. I don't hold any grudge. Not me. Not my style. Feller licks me, all right. When I am lucky enough to lick a feller, it's all right too."

O'Day was so astonished that he let this line of talk flow on and on. At last he managed to say:

"I'm sure glad you feel that way about it. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones."

"I knew you would. Always liked you, O'Day, always. Ha-ha! Had to try to get back at you for that little muss we got into. You understand. Pride and so forth, ha-ha! Didn't get back, so everything is off. Forget it. That right, boy?" turning to Jerry, who had been listening with all his ears to this astounding conversation.

"Why — why — sure, if — if you mean it," he stammered.

"Mean it? Of course. Just a little game,

that other. That's all. But come now; what's on your mind this morning, O'Day?"

"My timber is at the railroad. I want cars to ship it down here to you. When can I have them?"

O'Day said this in as matter of fact way as possible. He did not want Thomas to think there was any doubt in his mind about his right to have the cars. Realizing what a strain O'Day was under, Jerry felt he had done as well as could be expected. Thomas answered without hesitation.

"Cars? Sure you can have 'em. When? Possibly by day after to-morrow. You'll need how many?"

"I don't know. We've scaled a little over four million——"

"There's nearly four and a half, I think," put in Jerry. "I scaled scant so that we'd be on the safe side."

"Doesn't matter. I'll switch in trucks until you load it all up. Leave it to me. I'll fix it. Don't want to have you say Thomas wasn't a good loser!"

"I'm obliged," said O'Day simply, as he and

Jerry started for the door. "But I don't think you will lose much, for that's fine stuff we cut up there."

"I know it. You're right. Quite right. I won't lose much. Good-bye!"

When Link and Jerry were again on the street, the man remarked in a relieved tone.

"Thomas sure did the handsome thing, didn't he?"

"I don't know," slowly answered Jerry. "I——"

"What more could he do? Didn't he say he was licked and willing to take his licking like a man?"

"But, Link, that fellow would *say* anything to gain his ends. I never did trust him and I never will. He's got something up his sleeve——"

"What?"

"I don't know," confessed Jerry. "It's just that I'm afraid of him in spite of all his talk. If he *really* was beaten, I think I'd distrust him still. But as it is he isn't licked at all."

"How do you mean?"

"What we were talking about before we saw

him. If he wants to he can delay sending us cars until doomsday!"

"You're bugs about Thomas," O'Day laughed. "Tell me this: Didn't he say before witnesses that we could have cars? He did. And isn't that a good contract? It is. I've answered your fears, so don't worry. Thomas is probably a good sort at bottom. You told me a while ago not to borrow trouble. Take your own advice."

They had come to the postoffice while they had been talking. O'Day went to the window for the mail. A moment later he joined his companion, two or three letters in his hand.

"One from Thad Holman," he remarked, tearing open the envelope. "Wonder what he's got to say."

As he read, a look of dismay and worry came over his face, and when he had finished he turned to Jerry.

"Of all the rotten luck! Thad's sick. He says he needs me and wants me to come to him ——"

"Now?" Jerry exclaimed. "We need and want you here, Link. Why, anything might happen."

"I know it, but I reckon Thad Holman has a right to ask anything he likes of me. I'll have to go, Jerry, there's no two ways about it."

"But, Link," Jerry protested, seeing in his mind's eye the success or failure of the job resting on O'Day's being at hand to tackle any emergency. "You *can't* go! We'll get into a box somehow and all the winter's work will go up the spout. We'll be ruined!"

The man looked at Jerry with serious eyes.

"Jerry, my boy, there are some things that are worth more than success. One of them is repaying your obligations. Old Thad Holman has done things for me that I'll never be able to repay in full. If he's sick and wants me, I'll go to him if I never make another nickel in my life!"

In a flash Jerry saw his mistake.

"I'm sorry, Link. I'm a fool kid. You're dead right. I — I just couldn't get the job out of my mind for a minute. It seemed such rotten luck to lose out when we are so near the finish. You must go."

"I'll get back as soon as I can. It won't take more than ten days at the outside." He

looked at his watch. "I'm going to hop on the first train without going back to camp. It's due here in half an hour. Come on to the bank while I get some money."

O'Day spent the time before the train left in going over with Jerry the details of the job.

"You'll have to be boss again, Jerry. If you do as well as you did the last time, it will be a good thing for the job that I've got to go."

The boy flushed under this praise.

"It was because the gang was such a good bunch. I didn't do much," he answered. "But I'm going to do my best ——"

"I know you will. I've got all the confidence in the world that you will make good again."

At last the train puffed into the station and it was time for O'Day to climb on board.

"Good-bye," he said. "Everything is going to be all right. But it makes me go off a heap easier to know that Thomas isn't going to kick up a row about carrying our logs over his railroad. If that hadn't been fixed I'd have worried a lot. Good-bye."

Jerry stood watching the train out of sight.

As much as he wanted to he could not believe that O'Day was right in trusting Thomas. He had a vague feeling of things being wrong — of something about to happen. Thomas was at the back of it, he was sure. But what was the use of worrying? Whatever was in the wind, would happen in spite of anything he could see to do.

CHAPTER XX

THOMAS SHOWS HIS HAND

The next day, Jerry King put the whole gang to dragging the logs out of the water into positions from which they could easily be loaded into the cars when they came. Skidways had been built and everything was in readiness for loading.

Pierre Lavin and Blair had been told of what had happened in Thomas's office and their comments were not reassuring to Jerry. Both thought as he did, that Thomas had not accepted defeat so easily, that this move had been made only to conceal something much deeper.

"Huh, me, I don't think a snake change his skin this time of year. *This* kind of snake, maybeso, he *never* change his skin."

Ran Blair was equally certain that some sort of unexpected trouble was due to arrive, but could not name it. His guess was that the cars

would not come, that Thomas would starve them out.

Therefore there was a great surprise in store for all three when the next morning, as the lumberman had said was possible, they found a train of empty lumber trucks strung out on the track along their piles of logs.

"I guess we were all wrong and Link O'Day was right," commented Jerry, as they watched the men load the cars. "Thomas must have got religion."

Pierre shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know. Me, I think it is funny."

"It looks queer to me too," said Blair. "Thomas seems too anxious to do the right thing. What *is* he up to?"

But no one could answer that question.

"Well, fellows, maybe you are right, but if we can't dope out what's up it's a sure thing we can't take steps to head it off. As far as I can see, the only thing to do is to load those cars and trust to luck."

Nobody could make any counter suggestion, so the work went ahead. Pierre Lavin had rigged up several ingenious devices which hur-

ried the loading a lot, for they were able to use horse power as well as man power. The men were in holiday spirit; the end of their long winter's work seemed to be in sight and they were thinking of the good times they would have blowing in their wages. By the middle of the next morning each truck had been piled with all the logs it would carry safely.

"Nothing more to do now, Boss Jerry," reported Pierre, "but for to wait for that shoo-fly engine."

"All right, but while you're waiting pull some more logs from the river."

It was not until late in the afternoon that a logging locomotive came puffing up the track with a string of empties rattling behind.

"There she comes!" yelled Blair. "We've started now I guess."

When the train came to a stop a familiar figure dropped out of the engine cab.

Jerry had a sinking feeling around the pit of his stomach as he recognized the man who was walking towards them as Thomas.

"I wonder what he's doing up here," he muttered to himself.

"I'll be jiggered if I know," Blair answered, having overheard. "But I'll bet it isn't any birthday present he's bringing."

Thomas waved a genial hand in greeting.

"Where's O'Day?" he wanted to know. "I'd like to see him."

Jerry explained the boss's absence.

"Well, well. Sorry to hear that. Sorry. But who's in charge here? You were last time ——"

"I am now," returned the boy shortly. "What can I do?"

The lumberman looked the young boss up and down.

"Don't know. What can you do? Make a deal O'Day will stand behind?"

This was puzzling to Jerry. He could not imagine what Thomas was driving at. He thought for a moment and then answered —

"I don't know of any deal that has to be made, but I guess if I did Mr. O'Day would back me up."

"I'll tell you about the deal. It ain't nothing much. Just about the rate for carrying out your timber over my road. Freight rate, you know."

"What do you mean? The deal was that you would take out the logs for O'Day——"

"Surely. Quite right. I remember saying that. But at what price? I don't remember that! Very important point too, ha-ha!"

The cackle that went for a laugh with Thomas was unpleasant. A big burly man such as he was should have a big burly laugh, not a dry, clipped, mirthless rattle.

"Why didn't you fix this up with Mr. O'Day when we were in your office?" Jerry demanded, playing for time, for he realized that the thing he had feared and had not been able to foresee was about to be made clear to him.

"Forgot it. Clean as a whistle. Came here now just as soon as I thought of it!"

"Just when we've got a big bunch loaded!" Jerry shot out. "Come on now, Thomas, what's the game? I want to know."

"Easy. Never lose your temper, young man. I always say, never lose your temper. It don't get you anything. Besides, what do you mean by 'game'? No game. Just business——"

Jerry felt that he was being played with, that Thomas was playing with him as a cat does

with a mouse. He boiled inside with fury and desperation.

"What is this business?"

"You have logs. I have a railroad. You want to send your logs to the mill. All right. I'll take 'em as I promised. But——"

"But what?"

"I've got to be paid. Engine burns coal. Wages got to be paid. Where's money to come from? Freight, of course. Easy."

Jerry saw the whole thing in a flash. Thomas had no idea of reforming, of letting bygones be bygones, as he had said. The scene in the office had only been staged in order to let them struggle a little longer so that his revenge would be sweeter. However, there was just one chance that Thomas was not entirely bad. If his terms for carrying the timber were reasonable and fair, there would still be a little margin of profit. But the boy was sure that this was not going to happen even as he asked the question.

"How much do you want?"

The man's smile became almost a sneer as he answered:

"Four dollars and a quarter a thousand!"

Not for a second had Jerry imagined that the price would be as preposterous as this. For a moment he was speechless.

"But you are only paying us five dollars at the mill!"

"A very good price. Very good. Other contracts call for less, much less. Some as much as a dollar less."

"But four dollars and a quarter. That makes only seventy-five cents to — to pay the men ——"

"Railroad's an expensive thing. Very. Can't do it for less. Sorry, but you see how it is."

"I see how it is!" cried Jerry. "I see that you are a thief and you ought to be run out of the woods."

"Enough of that! It's my railroad. I'll charge what I please. You don't have to use it. Your logs can stay here and rot. You won't get anything. Not even seventy-five cents." He pulled a paper from his pocket. "Here, sign this. If you do, I'll pull your timber out. Don't and you'll not move a log!"

Jerry took the document and glanced at it.

When he had finished he tore it into small pieces and let them drop to the ground.

"There's your answer, you big hulk," he cried. "Keep your railroad. I'm not going to let you bluff me. Either you take out your logs or get out of here yourself. We'll beat you yet!"

Thomas looked at the boy surprised.

"Beat me?" he echoed. "What can you do, you crazy kid?"

"Don't worry about my being crazy or what I'll do," Jerry retorted. "Beat it or I'll call the gang. I think they've got a sort of grudge against the person who started that fight at the dam. Hurry!"

Thomas hesitated. He started to say something, thought better of it, turned on his heel, and made off towards the engine.

"Well, it's happened," said Jerry to Blair, who had been standing alongside him.

"Yes," Ran returned, "it has. But — but ——" he stopped, looked at Jerry hesitatingly, and without a word ran after Thomas.

"What in thunder is he up to?" thought Jerry, watching closely what was happening.

He saw Blair catch up to the man and start talking rapidly. Whatever he was saying seemed to upset Thomas more. He moved his arms and shouted. Jerry could not hear what he said but the tone was angry. Suddenly he saw Thomas quiet down, laugh and then slap Blair on the shoulder. Then the surprising thing happened.

Without once looking back, Blair walked beside Thomas to the locomotive, climbed in and was carried from the camp.

At first Jerry tried to find an explanation for Blair's desertion. Perhaps he was carrying out some plan to help the work, and there had been no time to explain. It was all right, Jerry tried to tell himself, but nothing would down the horrible conviction that Ran Blair had deserted to the enemy. When he realized that Jerry was beaten without a doubt, he had gone over to the winning side. Right now, he was probably telling Thomas a million and one details of the work, that the man wanted to know.

Jerry hated himself for being willing to believe this of the boy who had done so many things for the dam. This was the one thing

that he could hold onto in his struggling to save his opinion of Blair: that he had suffered and striven for the success of the work. That night at the dam and the suggestion that made the dam possible, were proof that he had been going straight. It was unthinkable that he should be a traitor.

But the facts had to be faced. Blair's leaving was a small matter considering the predicament they were in regarding the logs. Here they were, stranded, with no visible means of getting them to the mill.

He had torn up Thomas's contract without any real plan for the future. All he had known was that even if they went broke on the job it would be better to fail trying than to take the charity Thomas had offered when he proposed to leave them seventy-five cents a thousand.

While these thoughts went through his mind, Jerry had not moved from the spot where he had talked to Thomas. Now he started off to meet Pierre, who was coming towards him.

"What's the matter, Boss Jerry? Why has the shoo-fly gone away without our logs? When is it coming back?"

"Never, I guess," was the answer. "Thomas has shown his hand at last. You and Blair were right. Thomas wasn't licked."

"But — but what has happened?" insisted the foreman.

"Looks like we're finished," said the boy wearily. "Thomas wants four dollars and a quarter a thousand to carry our stuff to the mill."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him to get off the job or I'd have your husky lads help him off!"

"That is very good," cried Pierre, his eyes flashing. "The dog of a robber! Me, I think it serve him right."

"So do I, but what does it get us? We're stuck, as far as I can see."

Pierre sobered down in a twinkling. He hadn't thought of that angle of the mess.

"Do you think I should have taken Thomas's terms?" Jerry asked.

"No! Certainly not!"

"The men have money coming to them — the seventy-five cents might pay it ——"

"If any pig of a lumberjack tries for to

collect that pay, first he is got to fight me! But they won't, Boss Jerry. Maybeso, they would everyone rather go without than see that Thomas get the best of you."

"I believe it," cried Jerry, "but they must be paid, anyway. But what will happen if the logs don't go to the mill?"

"If they stay here until next year, they are no good; they rot quick. If that happens, Thomas, he will lose as well as you."

"That's the first good news I've heard today," returned Jerry. "I'd like to think he wasn't *making* anything out of us even if we have to lose."

"I understand. But, Boss Jerry, where did you send that young fellow, Blair? I see him go away with Thomas."

"I didn't send him, Pierre; he left."

"Left?"

"Yes. I started to say something and the next minute he was gone. Can you guess why? I can't and it bothers me."

Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybeso he think Thomas can do more for him. What you think?"

"I wish I knew. He *just* can't have played the traitor to us. That would be too rotten."

"I don't know, me," was the doubtful reply. "That fellow, he was no good once; maybeso he's no good again."

"I don't believe it, that's all there is to it. But, Pierre, isn't there something we can do about our logs? Some way of beating Thomas yet?"

Again Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybeso the good Lord will send a miracle. If a flood should come——"

The Frenchman was treated to the sight of his young boss dancing wildly and throwing his cap in the air.

"What's the matter? You crazy?" he demanded.

"You said it, Pierre, you said it!"

"Said what?"

"A flood. What about those old dams down the river? Remember I asked you about them one day? Why can't we build a couple more between here and there and drive our logs? Why can't we do that, tell me, why can't we do that?"

"Maybeso the flood water will go down before we can start——"

"Maybe it will, but we won't be any worse off than we are now, will we?"

"No-o-o," was the grudging reply.

"And maybe we *might* get through and if we did — can you see Thomas if we floated our four million and a half up to his mill? Can you see the look on his face!"

Pierre looked at Jerry steadily for a moment. Then a broad grin spread itself over his swarthy face. He had caught the boy's enthusiasm.

"Boss Jerry," he said solemnly, "for to see that Pierre Lavin would drive those logs over the Rocky Mountains with no more than an inch of water for to float 'em!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST PLAY

The chance that victory could be snatched out of almost certain defeat at this late hour was pretty slim, yet it gave Jerry and Pierre enough heart to go ahead with their plans.

There did not seem much change in the level of the water coming down the river bed they had laid out for it and Jerry was of the opinion that should it stay that way until the first dam was completed, they would not have much trouble in getting the logs to move.

The whole gang was put on the construction work and before the week was out it was done. The men had been told all that had happened and once more tackled the work given them to do with all their energy and enthusiasm.

"Maybeso we can let them go now," suggested Pierre, meaning to unshackle the boom and free the logs.

"Not yet, Pierre," directed Jerry. "I've got a plan I want to try out before we take a chance on this drive. Keep the men busy on the second dam to-morrow. I'm going down to Pentico."

It showed the confidence that Pierre had in his young boss when he turned away without another word. What Jerry said was law and it did not have to be explained in order to be put into effect.

Jerry caught the shoo-fly that afternoon and spent the night riding in a day coach. This manner of traveling does not give much chance for sleep, so he had time to perfect the plan he had in mind.

The case of Ran Blair worried him more than anything else. Not a word had he heard from Ran since he had last seen the boy climbing aboard the engine. He had hoped each day might bring back Ran or at least some explanation of the mystery. But the days had passed and he was as much in the dark as ever. In spite of all the evidence, damning as it was, Jerry could not give up hope that sometime, somehow, Blair would clear himself.

His reason told him it was a foolish hope and most of the night passed as he fought with himself for his friend. When he got out in Pentico in the early morning, he had not been able to settle the thing definitely.

Seven o'clock found him sitting in Thomas's office. The old bookkeeper had let him in when he came down to work.

As he waited patiently for the man he wanted to see, he felt that the bookkeeper's eyes were on him more often than on his ledger. He looked up once or twice to catch the old fellow at it.

"What's the matter with me?" he demanded at last. "Am I a curiosity?"

"Oh, no, dear me, no," expostulated the man. "I just was thinking——"

"What?" snapped the boy.

"How — how ol' Thomas caught you. It was a slick job——"

"You know about it?"

"Oh, yes, my yes. Thomas did something like that to me once——"

Jerry realized that this old man was not a friend of Thomas at all. Probably he hated the

big lumberman even while he was forced to work for him.

"How was that?" he asked.

"I — I was in the lumber business for myself and Thomas jobbed me. Then he gave me this place after he got all my money."

"Why have you stayed on?"

"Guess I must have lost my nerve. I — I just stayed. I'm telling you this, young man, because I don't want you ever to do any more business with Thomas. He's a devil!"

"I've had all I want of him myself," was Jerry's answer. "Thank you all the same."

The old fellow went back to his work and Jerry tried to puzzle out why he had been chosen as a confidant. The easiest explanation was that the bookkeeper felt a sort of relationship with him — they had been cheated by the same man.

A few moments later Thomas came in. When he caught sight of Jerry King he seemed surprised.

"What do you want? Come to try to make that deal with me?"

"I've come to make *a* deal with you," was the boy's quiet answer.

"Won't do it. Gave you a chance. You didn't take it up. Too late now. That's all. There's the door. Good-bye!"

He turned to his desk, barking some orders at the bookkeeper, who scurried out of the room like a frightened rabbit. When Thomas looked up again Jerry had not moved.

"Not gone yet? Beat it. Beat it quick! As quick as you made me beat it up the track the other day."

"I'm not going just yet," said Jerry, still keeping control of himself.

"So you're not going, my young buck? It will do no good to stay. I won't carry a stick, not a stick of your timber. Do you hear? Not a stick. You can whine all you like. I'm not going to help you."

"I don't want your help. But in spite of that you're going to carry our timber!"

"Are you bugs or am I? Haven't I just said I'd not carry it?"

"I heard you *say* it, but things you say don't mean anything."

The sarcasm was not lost on the big man. He bellowed: "Get out!"

"Not quite yet. I've got something more to say. You are going to take out our logs!"

"I am, am I? And who'll make me?"

"Common sense, I guess."

Clearly the man was puzzled. He had this boy absolutely cornered and yet here he was, cool and collected, defying him to his face. What was in the air? Could something have happened on which he had not counted? Was he going to lose out after all the trouble he had taken? These things sped through his mind before he answered:

"Common sense will make me, eh? I like that. If you and your partner had some common sense perhaps you wouldn't be in such a hole. But, young feller, I like your nerve. Tell me what's on your mind. I need a laugh." With this he settled back in his chair, his fingers stuck in his waistcoat pockets.

"Common sense will tell you not to throw away money, won't it?"

"Have you seen me throwing any away?"

"Not yet. But you are trying to mighty hard."

"You don't say! And how, I'd like to know."

"Refusing my deal before you hear it."

"I'll not be losing much on any deal you can make. You can't make one because I've got you in a fix where I don't have to fool with you."

Jerry determined to make a final bluff. If he had to put his plan before Thomas without being asked for it, the scheme would lose a lot of its power to convince. Thomas *must* ask.

It was clear to Jerry that the man was curious but he did not want to lose the advantage he felt he had gained by being unwilling to deal at any terms. If that curiosity was strong enough he would ask and the boy put it to the test. He got up and started for the door.

"Sorry you feel that way," he said, "because it will cost you money. So long."

As Jerry's hand touched the doorknob he heard the word that he had been sure would be said.

"Stop! Wait a bit."

His bluff had not been called.

"What's the use, if you don't want to hear what I've got to say? I'd better be on my way back to the job. I've got a heap to do."

The lumberman jumped at this last remark.

"A lot to do! Why you're done. Finished! Licked to a frazzle!" He stopped short and looked at Jerry, who had managed to make his lips curve into a smile. This puzzled Thomas and for a moment he lost control of himself. This boy had something up his sleeve. He must know it!

"What's the grin for? What do you want to say? Hurry up. What is it?"

"I'll give you seventy-five cents a thousand to bring in that timber!" Jerry shot at him.

Thomas laughed and it was a boisterous improvement over his usual ha-ha. "Well, I got the laugh I wanted. Good. I like to laugh."

"It's not so funny as all that," stoutly returned the boy. "I mean it. If you'll sign at that figure right now I'll go through with it — but this is your last chance!"

The earnestness with which Jerry said this made its impression.

"And if I don't?"

"You'll pay the full five dollars at the mill."

"Is that so? And how are you going to get to the mill?"

"That's the bet you overlooked!" cried Jerry

exultantly. "We can get to the mill all right."

What he meant was that he had a chance of getting to the mill if the freshet water stayed with him long enough and everything else went well. But it was no time now for anything but absolute confidence.

Thomas looked at him in amazement, but before he could say anything Jerry had gone on speaking rapidly and clearly, every word bringing to the man the conviction that the boy knew exactly what he was talking about.

"We can get to the mill but it will cost us about a dollar a thousand. The reason I've come to give you a chance is that it's easier — and cheaper for us. Besides, it will be less expensive for you. Five dollars is a pretty husky price and if it can be cut down a little I guess you won't be sorry. I——"

The big lumberman could hold himself no longer.

"But — but how are you going to get the logs down here? That's what I want to know. Hire an airship? You're dreaming, kid, you're dreaming. There *ain't* any way out of the woods except my railroad."

The hardest part had come for Jerry. He must convince Thomas that he could drive his logs out or his plan would fail. If the lumberman went up to the camp he would see how many chances there were against success and in all probability would refuse.

"There's not much dream about riding our timber out on the flood water, is there?" he challenged. "We brought it as far as the railroad that way——"

"I know that. But you can't get 'em any farther."

"Can't we? How about that bunch of dams you built down the river? How about putting in two or three more?"

"You haven't got time."

Thomas at last realized that he had underestimated the people he had tried to ruin. He had thought of the dams down the river but they had been so far away from Camp Twenty-nine that he had risked no one's ever seeing them.

Coward at heart, when he saw the game going against him, he started planning to cover his loss. He could fight only when he held the

winning cards. He was beaten and he knew it as he waited for Jerry's answer.

"Time? We've got two of 'em built already. If you don't agree, I'm going up and start the drive in the morning."

Something in Thomas's manner as he said, "Wait a minute — don't go ahead too fast," told the boy that he had won. But he knew delay might be fatal, so he pulled a paper out of his pocket, and laid it in front of the lumberman.

"Can't wait. My train goes in a few minutes. Sign it or ——"

Thomas did not hesitate. Grabbing a pen he scrawled his name at the bottom.

"There! Satisfied?" he snarled.

"You'd better read it," was the answer. "It calls for cars to be delivered when we're ready for them or you'll be out a forfeit. We're not going to be held up."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, you are to take your freight money out of the sum due us for the timber, not before. I guess that's all."

Thomas was a pitiable sight. It was bitter

medicine he was taking, especially so because it was a boy who was giving it to him. He sat hunched up in his chair, all the assertiveness and braggadocio gone from him.

"Why don't you go?" he muttered. "You've got everything you want. Go, leave me alone."

"Before I do I wish you would tell me something," asked Jerry earnestly. "What did you do with Blair?"

But Thomas was never to answer that question, for at that moment the door burst open and in walked Ran Blair himself, followed by a heavy-set older man!

CHAPTER XXII

VICTORY

"Jerry!" exclaimed the newcomer, rushing over with hand outstretched. "Gee, but I'm glad you're here! Why aren't you in the woods?"

Jerry King hesitated for a second and then, his faith in his friend getting the better of his distrust, clasped his hand warmly. Somehow he *knew* that Blair was all right, that in due time the mystery of his going away would be explained. Before he had time to answer the question, Ran was talking again.

"My father, Jerry," he said, turning to the man. "This is Jerry King, Dad——"

Before they could shake hands, Thomas had risen from his desk and had come forward.

"Mr. Blair, I didn't expect you——"

"I didn't want you to, Thomas," said the man icily, turning his back on the big lumber-

man. "I'm glad to see *you,* Jerry King. My boy has told me of the things you have done for him."

As the boy stammered some response, he realized that the explanation he had wanted would soon be made.

"Perhaps you'd like to know that the reason I came up here was on account of what my boy had to tell me."

"Yes, sir," said Jerry respectfully, not knowing what else to say.

At this point Ran Blair broke in: "Oh, Dad, let me tell Jerry what's up. You are balling him up so's he can't understand a thing!"

"Do it your own way, my son."

"Well, here it is: When I saw Thomas going away after trying to bleed you on the railroad rate, a plan came to me suddenly. There was no time to tell you about it, for I had to get the first train for San Francisco and the quickest way I knew was to go into Pentico with Thomas on his shoo-fly. I worked you for that ride, didn't I?" he laughed at the man, who was looking worried.

"Yes, you — you ——"

"Enough of that!" barked the elder Blair, and Thomas closed his mouth like a spring mousetrap.

"Well, Jerry, I caught the train I wanted by the skin of my teeth and not long after I was knocking on the door of my Dad's office. Several office boys tried to throw me out but they hadn't been in the woods all winter and they found it more of a job than they thought. I've told you how Dad had sent me away until I made good. It was a shock, wasn't it, Dad, to see me show up in my woods clothes? Didn't exactly look right then as if I'd made very good, did it?"

"Not at first, but when you told me your errand — that you wanted me to help you save the people who had believed in you and given you a chance after what you had done to them, I saw that you had made good in a far better way than if you had come with a pocketful of money. All he wanted me to do, Jerry, was to buy this logging railroad so you could bring in the timber you had cut."

Jerry's eyes shone with pleasure.

"Good boy, Ran! It was a great thing to do."

"Well, Dad has pots of money and I thought he might as well help us out."

"But it wasn't necessary, Ran, because I found a way to make Thomas be reasonable. If you'd waited I'd have told you ——"

Ran had to know all about the scheme for the drive and how Jerry had used it to bring Thomas around. Jerry finished by showing the paper he had finally made the lumberman sign.

"Let me see it," Mr. Blair said, reaching for the document.

He hardly glanced at it and then to Jerry's horror, tore it into small pieces!

"That's the ticket!" cried Thomas. "Serve 'em right. I ——"

"Enough, Thomas. When I want to hear from you I'll say so."

By this time Jerry had gathered his startled wits together.

"But, Mr. Blair, why did you do that? Now Thomas has got us again!"

"No, Jerry, he hasn't," smiled the man. "I tore your contract up because I don't want you to pay *anything* for freightage."

"I've figured it will cost in labor and time pretty near a dollar a thousand to drive our logs even if we have all sorts of luck."

"Who said anything about driving them?"

"Oh, Jerry, don't you *see?*" Ran burst into the conversation. "Dad *owns* the railroad!"

A great light broke upon the boy. The logs were coming in free.

"You — you bought it then, as Ran wanted you to?" he stammered to Mr. Blair.

But Ran answered the question —

"He didn't have to — he owned it all the time."

"Gee whiz!" was all that Jerry could manage to say.

"It's this way," explained Mr. Blair. "I happen to own a lot of timber rights up here and I've found it best to operate under the names of my managers. The firm of Thomas & Olsen is really just Henry P. Blair. When Randolph told me the situation I thought I'd better come up and look things over myself. Thomas!" the capitalist snapped the name out sharply.

"Yes — yes, sir!" The big man who had

been so self-assured when bullying Jerry a little while before now seemed to have lost his grip. He trembled visibly as his employer's keen eyes looked him up and down.

"It's time I knew what you have been up to, I think. If you have been capable of using the authority I've given you to satisfy a personal enmity of your own, I think you are capable of anything! Bring out all your books — I'll take them to the hotel with me. I want no changes made in them for my benefit!"

"You are wrong, Mr. — Mr. Blair. I nev — never meant any harm. I saw a way to make money for you ——"

"Enough, sir! You know that I have never wanted any money that was not fairly earned. My orders that everyone should receive square and honorable treatment from my firm, have never been changed. I wish I could know if you have been up to any other such tricks ——"

"He has, he has!" cried a new voice. "Lots of them — I can tell you! I will tell you!"

It was the old bookkeeper, who evidently had slipped back into the room when everybody was too excited to notice him.

"Shut up," screeched Thomas, "Mr. Blair, he's crazy——"

But Thomas was too late. The man he had ruined and had then given this job so that he could taunt him, was in full swing. Once having been able to get his courage up to the point of telling his story, he went on and on, telling figures and facts that were damning enough to send Thomas to jail.

Before he had gone far, however, Mr. Blair stopped him long enough to tell the two boys that they had better be off, that this was a matter between Thomas and himself.

"Come on, Ran," said Jerry, "we've just got time to catch the train for camp."

"That's a good idea," said Mr. Blair. "Go on; I'll come up to-morrow when I get things straightened out here," and with this he turned back to pay attention to the bookkeeper's story.

Jerry and Ran found plenty to talk about on the trip up. They told all the details of things that had happened while they had been separated and each was immensely satisfied with what the other had done.

Pierre was waiting for them at the crossing

when the shoo-fly stopped. He was crazy with delight when he heard the news.

"Then we don't have for to use those dams, eh? The men, they work like the — the anything. They finish up number two to-day."

"Good work! They won't lose anything by it, I know. Go on and tell 'em so."

"Me, I think maybeso they like it better if you come to the bunkhouse and tell 'em yourself. What you think?"

"All right, if you want me to," agreed Jerry.

The boys turned in that night with the sound of the men's cheers still ringing in their ears. There had been high jinks in the bunkhouse after the men knew for certain that the long fight had been won.

Early the next morning the loaded cars were pulled out and a new string of empty trucks was shunted into the siding.

"Your father is giving us quick action," laughed Jerry.

"He's some hustler when he gets started, all right! I'm sure glad I got the hunch to go down for him. Even if it hasn't done you any good ——"

"But it has," Jerry protested.

"Anyway, it's been bully for me. We've made up and — and it's going to be the best thing in the world for me."

"You bet it is," was Jerry's comment. Their talk then turned to the work.

Mr. Blair did not turn up in camp all day. But the evening shoo-fly brought back Link O'Day several days before Jerry had expected him.

He was worried and anxious as he came into the office where Jerry was doing some figuring before going to bed. He had hardly said "hello" before he was inquiring about the work.

"How's — how's things, Jerry? Did Thomas get nasty?"

The boy told him the whole story.

"Well," said O'Day when he had finished, "we've won out on this job in spite of *me*. The credit's all yours, my boy! All I could do was make mistakes!" He laughed happily. "But I'm so tickled about it all that I'm not even going to punish myself. It's great news you've given me, simply great!"

Now it was Jerry's turn to ask questions.

"How did you find Mr. Holman? I hope he's all right."

"He had been pretty sick but when I got there he was so much better that I could catch the next train back. I'm glad I went."

"I'll bet you are — but it's good to have you back."

"It's good to be back, especially when there's such good news to be welcomed with. I've got some news too ——"

"About me?" said Jerry eagerly.

"Yes, good news too, in a way."

"Hurry up, Link, don't keep me guessing. What is it?"

"Tim Fallon wasn't any relation to you, but I knew that all the time. Your father was a mechanic named West and your mother died when you were a tiny baby. At the time this happened your family was boarding with the Fallons. A little later your father was killed by a falling beam. He left a little money, which the Fallons immediately used. They were so afraid that someone might find out about this theft that they moved away, taking you with

them. That's all I could learn, Jerry, but it breaks up our idea that we might be brothers, doesn't it?"

"Yes," slowly answered Jerry, who had been drinking in with all his ears the things he had longed to know for so many years. "But it doesn't make much difference after all, does it? We are pretty good friends. You have been fine to me. Seems to me that if people are real friends it means about as much as being brothers."

"That's the right idea. I'm glad you are taking it that way. I've been hoping you would. We're friends, real friends, and we're going to stay that way, through thick and thin. But, Jerry, what about your name? Will you change it to West?"

"I don't know," was the doubtful answer. "What's your idea?"

"You've done some things to make the name of King respected," advised O'Day. "I don't see why you should change it. But think it over; it doesn't have to be done at once."

Before Jerry said good night, he tried to tell O'Day how grateful he was for all the

trouble the man had taken to trace out his parentage.

"You see, Link, until I *knew,* this thing used to worry me a lot. Up here on this job I've been so busy I haven't had time to bother about it. But now, Link, I feel as if somebody had lifted a great load from my shoulders. Somehow, the important thing isn't *who* my father was or whether he is dead or alive — it's just having it settled. Can you get what I'm trying to say?"

"Sure I can. I've had it happen to me. But beat it for the hay now. We've been gabbing away until it's so late that soon it will be early."

The next morning another batch of empty log trucks rolled onto the siding. Mr. Blair was a passenger. The boys spied him and bore him off to meet Link O'Day.

After the greetings were over, Mr. Blair said suddenly:

"I'm very pleased that you happened to come back before I had to leave, Mr. O'Day. I've got a proposition I'd like to have you consider."

Link O'Day showed his surprise by not being able to think of anything to say.

"Yes," continued the capitalist, "I would like very much indeed if you would take the position Thomas has left vacant in my organization."

"What happened to Thomas, Dad?" asked Blair.

"After what I learned in his office the other day, I think he was glad to get out of town without being arrested. What delayed me was the fact that Olsen did not come to town until yesterday. You'll find him a good fellow to work with, Mr. O'Day, if you should accept my offer."

O'Day seemed to hesitate. Then he said, "I certainly appreciate what you are offering me, Mr. Blair, but I can't consider anything which does not take Jerry into the plan, thank you just the same."

"Don't you do anything foolish on my account," cried the boy. "Do what Mr. Blair wants you to. I'll be all right."

O'Day smiled at the boy but shook his head. "No, Jerry, we'll have to plug along together ——"

"What's all this anyway?" barked Mr. Blair. "Who said anything about Mr. O'Day and

Jerry being separated? I did not, I'm sure. Both these young limbs — your boy and mine — will be your assistants. Does that make any difference?"

"You bet it does!" cried O'Day. "I'll go you, if you want me to, but if the truth is told, Jerry is a better woodsman than I am."

"You were able to make the lad loyal to you and work his head off and all the gang's heads off to make a success, weren't you? Well, that's the sort of man I need. That's all there is to it. We'll consider the matter closed."

Jerry had been thinking while this conversation had been taking place. Now he ventured a question.

"But Mr. Blair, why are you doing all this for us?"

"Why? Isn't it pretty plain? Didn't you give my boy a chance when he didn't deserve one? And then gave him another one when he failed you the first time"

"Jerry did," Link O'Day put in. "I had nothing to do with it."

"Well, one of you did all those things. It was something I couldn't seem to do — make a

man out of my son. I could make money but that only seemed to hurt Randolph, not help him. Now, I'm proud of him and I'm convinced that I'll remain proud of him if he doesn't get away from you two. That's why I want to make it worth your while to stay with me."

"That suits me!" cried Ran. "Here's to the new firm! But what's it going to be called, Dad?"

"O'Day & Olsen. But the silent partners are Blair and King. And, O'Day, unless I am very much mistaken, the youngsters are going to give you a run for your money! Well, I see they are getting ready to pull out. I'll have to go; I've been away from San Francisco too long as it is. As soon as the logs are all at the mill, come down and visit us, Randolph. Your mother wants to see you. Bring Jerry with you — good-bye."

A few days later all the timber had been scaled at the mill. As Jerry had prophesied, the total was nearer four million and a half than four. There was a fine net profit left for O'Day and Jerry even after the generous bonus to the men had been paid.

Pierre Lavin had refused to be discharged with the rest of the gang. O'Day found him a job at the mill that would keep him busy until winter came again and the work in the woods would commence.

Ran Blair had gone to visit his people but Jerry had not accompanied him, as he and Link had planned to cruise a big tract of timber that would need cutting before long.

"Glad you came along with me?" asked O'Day one night before they started on their trip. "You don't regret giving up the Reclamation Service?"

"No, Link," said Jerry King slowly. "Not for a minute. This is the life I love. The woods, the snow in winter, the fights and struggles — this is my job and I'm happy."

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